

Question of Privilege

According to the press, officials of the minister's department a day or two ago were making available, to certain reporters, information directly from the file on this case. The minister says he has not seen the file. On what basis can he blacken the reputation of a whole government and a former prime minister? This, sir, is outright slander and it ill behoves the minister who holds the portfolio of justice to engage in such tactics.

In so far as the public is concerned, and in so far as parliament is concerned, the presumption is that when a minister of justice speaks he has access to full information. The whole weight of his office is placed behind the charges he has made. He must now substantiate them. It is his obligation as a minister, as a member of the government and as a man of honour and integrity, to substantiate the charges he made outside and inside the house against the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) and other Privy Councillors, and remove the cloud that is hanging over the heads of some of the members of the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, if the minister is not prepared to do this he must resign. The minister's action in this case, his leaking of information to the press, his calling a press conference to place in the public domain suggestions, insinuations and allegations which he dare not make in this house, demonstrates his unfitness for the position he holds and his total failure to grasp even a glimmering of the responsibility of that position.

The minister cannot be allowed to get away with this kind of action. This parliament must not allow him to get away with this kind of action. To countenance the method he has used would mean that none in political life would be free from insidious and cowardly attacks, without substantiation, at any time. Parliament cannot, I submit, be reduced to that state.

This is not a question of supporting accusations, with respect to the comments of the Chair this afternoon, against a minister. This is a question of dealing with the fact that the minister both in this House and outside has made charges, insinuations and allegations affecting members of this House, namely, the Leader of the Opposition and the members of the former cabinet, some of whom are sitting here this evening.

The request before us raises an issue as to the responsibility of a member of this House to substantiate charges.

Mr. Duquet: Did you, in respect of bankruptcies?

Mr. Nielsen: My hon. friend is new in this house. The charges which I brought were made the subject of a commission, and I had the distinct honour of being in the presence of Mr. Justice Dorion prior to his findings.

Mr. Duquet: I hope you keep that honour.

Mr. Nielsen: The question before us is one dealing with the fact that a minister, both inside this house and outside, made insinuations and allegations against the Leader of the Opposition and members of his former cabinet. He must substantiate the charges he made, just as those members on the other side obliged me to do with respect to matters raised in 1964. I submit that responsibility falls more heavily upon a minister, and heaviest of all on the Minister of Justice, since this is claimed to be a matter involving national security. Those are my submissions, sir. You have two motions before you and I am prepared to move a third with respect to this specific question of privilege that has been raised by me in the absence of the Leader of the Opposition regarding statements made when he was not in this house, nay even in this city to defend himself against despicable and insidious charges on the part of the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must say again that the essence of the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Yukon does not differ greatly from those raised this afternoon, inasmuch as we are dealing again with the same statements made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cardin).

Mr. Nielsen: It is a new one.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Yukon says it is a new one. There were certain statements made by the Minister of Justice in the house this afternoon. There may have been more made since then, but I have not heard of them. My understanding is that we are dealing with the statements made in the house this afternoon and that those statements were the subject of the discussion in the house this afternoon.

As the hon. member states, there are two motions now before the Chair. According to our procedures there really should be only one. However, as a result of the way things were taking place during the course of the afternoon, the Chair found itself in the position of having two motions. It would be highly irregular to entertain a third.