

Privilege—Mr. Foster

Mr. Speaker: The questions as enumerated by the Parliamentary Secretary have been answered. Shall the remaining questions stand?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED DENIAL OF INFORMATION TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege because I have just learned within the last hour that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) plans to make a speech this afternoon before the Canadian Agricultural Outlook Conference and doubtless will be doing a major publicity activity there. That is part of the territory. It could be argued in this House that such information should be made available to this House of Commons.

However, my question of privilege relates to the fact that the Government has established a lock-up and briefing for the press starting at about 40 minutes from now, which apparently will carry through until 1.45 p.m. when the Prime Minister speaks at the Outlook Conference.

This information and briefing is being provided to the press gallery. Notices and invitations have been posted in the Press Gallery and in the press briefing room at the conference centre. However, repeated calls to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) and the Minister responsible for Grains and Oilseeds (Mr. Mayer) to make arrangements for Members of Parliament, especially Members of the Opposition, to attend that press lock-up and briefing have drawn no response or actions from the Ministers.

● (1120)

This is clearly a violation of the privileges of Members of the House. They are being denied access to government information while the press is being provided with the information. There are all kinds of precedents. The information provided at the lock-up last Friday morning for the media on the Canada-U.S. trade agreement was also provided to Members of Parliament. The lock-up and briefing on the Auditor General's report includes Members of Parliament.

We know that Canadian agriculture is in crisis. Members of the Opposition should have the same access to information as have members of the press gallery. I call on the Government to take action immediately. If it does not and you, Mr. Speaker, find that I have established a *prima facie* case to show that the privileges of Members are being trampled on, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Speaker: This may be a point of order but it is clearly not a question of privilege. It may well be a complaint. However, as I said yesterday and have been saying repeatedly,

especially in the interests of Canadians who are watching this, a question of privilege relates to something which has happened, something which was done, something which was said, or something which has not taken place, which impinges on the ability of a private Member to carry on his or her duties as a Member of Parliament in the interests of the people of Canada.

While the Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) may very well raise a matter of complaint, it does not extend to privilege. However, I will take it as a point of order and it may be that the Government would wish to respond. However, that is completely up to the Government.

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)): Mr. Speaker, whether it is a question of privilege or a point of order, it is clearly an alleged anticipatory breach, in my opinion. I heard what my hon. colleague said. We will look into the matter and try to ensure that all Members of the House get the same information at the same time. I have no knowledge that they will not.

I am pleased that my hon. friend drew to the attention of the House, through *Hansard*, the efforts that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is making on behalf of Canadian farmers. I believe this is the first time he has ever attended this type of conference. We appreciate all the support we can get in getting the word out. I would like to thank my hon. friend.

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POINT OF ORDER

ALLEGED MISSTATEMENT OF NUMBER OF SIGNATURES

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I had occasion this morning to see one of the petitions that was tabled by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) after his protestation that it had several hundred signatures on it. There are 84 signatures on it. I also notice that it has never been certified by the Clerk of Petitions which is a requirement under our Standing Orders.

Mr. Axworthy: I am sorry, it was.

Mr. McKinnon: I would like to ensure that petitions tabled in this House are referred to more accurately as to numbers and, in all cases, certified by the Clerk of Petitions in accordance with our standards.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. The certificate signed by Clairette Bourque, the Clerk of Petitions, duly certified this petition. Unfortunately, the staple came off and the sheet in question was not included with the petition. I would be happy to table that with the petition in the name of my hon. friend.