

Privilege—Mr. Gagliano

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members have helped the Chair a great deal in their interventions. The matter is of grave concern to Members and the Chair is going to consider all of the representations very carefully and report to the House as expeditiously as possible.

The Chair is also aware that feelings in this matter are and have been tense. I want to thank Hon. Members for accepting my suggestion that we make a little extra effort this afternoon to be sure that however severely we may feel about any of the issues raised in this particular matter, we recognize the civilities of this place. That has been done and the Chair wants to express its appreciation for that conduct.

The Chair is also aware that the Hon. Member for Burlington (Mr. Kempling) is placed in a difficult and uncomfortable position. I want to thank Hon. Members for hearing him out as courteously as he was heard.

There is another matter of privilege and I recognize the Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard—Anjou (Mr. Gagliano).

ALLEGED ASPERSION CAST ON CREDIBILITY OF MEMBER

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in Question Period the Hon. Minister of National Revenue (Mr. MacKay), in answering a question from his own back-benchers, tried to discredit my credibility in this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House I said, and I quote from *Hansard* at page 1275:

At my request this morning a woman—

—I repeat, a woman—

telephoned the Revenue Canada office in Montreal. She gave my name, my social insurance number, my address, my date of birth. She was able to have access to my 1985 income tax return.

The important thing here is that a woman—and I don't think I could be mistaken for a woman—was able to have access to my income tax return.

So as far as I know, it seems that when someone calls and gives a social insurance number, they get out the first page of the income tax return containing the following information: address, date of birth, social insurance number, married or unmarried, single, divorced, and sex: male or female. It was obvious that here was a woman calling about an income tax return that belonged to a man, and the person at the other end of the line should have wondered about this.

Mr. Speaker, there is something wrong with the whole procedure, and it is dangerous, since traditionally, information on income tax returns is confidential.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the Minister is questioning my credibility, because it seems there were other versions. Of course he has every right to think so and say so, without challenging the credibility of other Members of this House. Besides, my version is also different from his.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of principle I wanted to stress in my question yesterday, and that is in fact why I am raising a question of privilege today, is that my credibility is being challenged. Instead of trying to challenge my credibility, the Minister ought to make sure that after this microfiche theft, Canadians need not fear that anyone could have access to their income tax returns, because, Mr. Speaker, income tax returns are sacred, they are personal.

Mr. Speaker, I would therefore ask, through you, that the Minister apologize in the House for having challenged the credibility of a Member and give Canadians the assurance that accidents like the one that happened yesterday will not happen again.

[English]

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I am very much indebted to my colleague for giving me a further opportunity to set the record straight. First, if he examines my remarks, I suggested that he did not tell the whole story. That is why I am glad to be able to take this opportunity very briefly to say to him, a Member for whom I have the greatest respect, that in a matter as serious as this—and I and the Government have made no attempt to minimize its seriousness—no additional speculations, extrapolations or half data should be put before the public to make them needlessly afraid of what might or might not occur.

What my colleague said, in so far as he said it, was correct, but he did not leave the impression that I think Canadians were entitled to receive under the circumstances. He says he has a different version, and perhaps he does, but it raises a lot of questions when he puts the question to me as he did yesterday about employees' integrity and violation of the system which he implied may have occurred because of the data he supplied.

With the leave of the House I will be very brief and put down, without violating his confidentiality, what actually did occur on the basis of what I was given by my Deputy Minister. I think it is of interest to all Canadians.

• (1650)

At 10.43 yesterday a call relating to my colleague opposite was received by an inquiries officer at the Montreal district office. The caller, an English-speaking female, after giving the SIN number and date of birth of the Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard—Anjou (Mr. Gagliano), asked about a particular item in his return. Through our computer system the employee satisfied herself that such an item was in fact in the return. No confidential information was given since, when our employee asked the caller for further detail about the deduction, the caller hung up. I think that is relevant and gives some assurance to Canadians.

At 10.59 a French-speaking female person called the Montreal district office. The call was received by another inquiries officer. The caller gave my colleague's name, SIN number and date of birth and again asked about an item. I will