

● (1620)

In each instance the Minister of Finance has referred to a single letter, "the" letter or "the" representation. Furthermore, the Minister underlines the fact the letter was sent not to the Minister, but to his officials. Indeed, he corrected the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain who asked that the documents sent to the Minister be tabled by saying, "Mr. Speaker, the letter was not sent to me but to my officials".

Wednesday, January 25 arrived, and the Minister did not table the letter. The explanation was that the letter required translation. Another day passed, and there was still no action on the part of the Minister. Finally, on Friday last the Minister tabled not only one letter, the one he had been referring to all week, but rather a telex to the Deputy Minister, a letter to the Deputy Minister of Finance, a telex to the previous Minister of Finance, a letter to the previous Minister of Finance, a telex from the Deputy Minister, a letter to the Minister of Finance and a note on a covering page to the effect that an oral representation concerning retirement allowances had been made to the Department.

Again today the Minister has made reference to the fact that he has heard—which is the worst and sheerest kind of hearsay evidence and which would never be allowed in any court of this country—that he had been informed by certain people that there had been conversations of an oral nature that took place within the Department.

All this correspondence took place between January 19, 1982 and January 25, 1983. None of the correspondence supports the contention that has been made and the allegation that attempted to impugn the integrity of an officer of the House, the Leader of the Opposition, and has not been able to be sustained by the Minister. He has in fact apologized, which gives credence to the points of order being raised today.

The Minister stood in his place and said: "I have made a gross error. I admit that I was without any justification whatsoever with respect to the allegation that I had made. I admit that I wrongly tabled these documents". That leads us to the question of the propriety under those circumstances of the very legitimate points of order that my colleagues have raised.

I join with them in saying that when a Minister of the Crown says that he did a wrongful act, we should look at the rules which govern those kinds of tabling of documents and whether there should be a ruling from you, Mr. Speaker, as to the propriety in terms of the Minister's activities, which will serve as a precedent for anyone who attempts to use this type of device to impugn the integrity of an Hon. Member.

Another twist to this matter is this: One has to look at this in the context of how we are able to define and determine whether there has been a selective representation of correspondence to suit the Government of the day. In this case I can prove by a reading of the record that there are items and letters that were not disclosed. This is what makes it difficult for us to sustain and support any practice in the House which allows a Minister of the Crown, and only a Minister of the

### *Point of Order—Mr. Epp*

Crown, under our existing rules to table documents of this nature. It is not available for me as a member of the Opposition or even for any backbencher on the Government side. A member of the Treasury benches is the only person who can do that.

A specific example of what I am talking about is a letter by my Leader when he was President of the Iron Ore Company, dated April 30, 1982 addressed to the Deputy Minister of Finance. In the second paragraph my Leader said:

As I explained to the Minister in my letter of November 30 last, these employees have spent their working careers in remote mining communities at considerable personal sacrifice, and in consideration, the company was prepared to supplement their pensions by means of retiring allowances.

I quote that because there was a reference to a letter of November 30 last. This letter dealt ostensibly with precisely the same representations that had been made and was excluded for whatever reason. I am the last one to suggest that it would be the intention of the Government to keep off the public record a letter which goes to the heart of a man who is concerned about the average working citizen of Canada. I would be the last to suggest that is the case, but what other conclusion can one draw when we see a very legitimate representation made on behalf of working people in Canada in northern areas mysteriously excluded from the letters that were in fact tabled by the Minister?

What is curious about this whole process of the letters that were put in and tabled by the Minister is that that seems to have been the very best effort he can make to substantiate an unfounded allegation. This is unfortunate. I stand here more out of sorrow than out of anger. It is my institution, the House of Commons. The Canadian people expect more from their politicians. This was reflected, as Members well know, in a recent poll regarding the parliamentary institution. People expressed concern with regard to the activities of certain of us in the House.

As my colleague for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) pointed out, this is probably one of the most important points of order that one can raise in terms of the integrity of the House of Commons and our function as Members of Parliament, to stand and be able to question an all-powerful executive who have considerable devices available to them in terms of executive power and disclosure of information and to wreak havoc in the lives of Canadians if they are so inclined.

It is important as we approach the mandatory time for a federal election to be concerned about the integrity of the institution and the integrity of Ministers of the Crown in bringing in, for whatever purpose, political or otherwise, a selected version of the truth.

I make this representation in support of the contention that you, as the first Commoner and custodian of our rights as Speaker of the House of Commons, must look at this matter in terms of rulings within your power, which I suggest they are with the precedents quoted by my colleagues, in order to give guidance to all Members of the House of Commons, whether they be on the Government side or the Opposition side, to