

Inquiries of the Ministry

over and above the law of the land as it applies to other citizens. Parliamentary privilege is the sum of extraordinary rights claimed by Parliament for itself to ensure that Parliament can function freely and without hindrance. These privileges are very limited in scope, and parliamentary law itself prescribes that this scope cannot be extended. Essentially, parliamentary privilege is, therefore, freedom of speech beyond the prescriptions of the common law in reference to libel and to slander.

Does parliamentary privilege as thus defined include a special right and exemption from the law, a special privilege providing an exemption from a practice which applies to other citizens equally? Do the very particular circumstances alluded to by the hon. member for Peace River constitute a prima facie case of breach of parliamentary privilege which might be referred, as suggested by the hon. member, to a committee for the purpose of advising the Chair?

I must say in all honesty and after much consideration of the matter raised by the hon. member for Peace River and the very important points made yesterday by the right hon. member for Prince Albert that it would be difficult for the Chair, in view of past practice, to conclude that in the present circumstances there is a prima facie case of breach of privilege. I suggest to hon. members that it would be imprudent of the Chair to project the question of police files beyond the circumstances or conditions raised by the hon. member and beyond the particular circumstances alluded to by the minister in his reply to the House and in the statement made outside the House to which the hon. member for Peace River has alluded.

For the time being, and considering the very special circumstances, I cannot find a prima facie case of privilege on the facts as presented to the Chair thus far. I think I should insist that I consider the matter to be a very serious one, that certainly I recognize the duty of the Chair on behalf of all hon. members to ensure that it will be possible for them to discharge freely their responsibilities as Members of Parliament, and if any special circumstances were brought to the attention of this House and to the Chair that hon. members in any way, by police or other practices, were in some way intimidated in their work or prevented from discharging their duties freely and without hindrance I would have no hesitation in recognizing the matter as a breach of privilege. But I must rule at the moment on the particular circumstance brought to the attention of the Chair and decide whether there is a prima facie case of privilege on this basis. My finding must be that there is not.

• (2:30 p.m.)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I shall wait until the Minister of National Defence returns to the House in order to welcome him back to Canada properly.

[Mr. Speaker.]

OIL**PROPOSED TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE SYSTEM—STUDY OF EFFECTS OF POSSIBLE POLLUTION FROM TANKERS—MEETING WITH UNITED STATES OFFICIALS**

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Minister of Transport. It arises out of the growing evidence of increasing support in the United States for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, now supported by the President's Economic Council and by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Maurice Stans. Has any study been made by his department as to the possible effects of large oil tankers travelling between Valdez and Cherry Point and other points on the Pacific coast and, if such a study has been made, has it been completed and will it be made available to the members of this House?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would assume that by "possible effects" of the transportation of oil the hon. member means the possible effects of some disaster, natural or otherwise, in the transportation of oil. The answer is that studies are under way on this question and have been for some time, not all related to the particular project to which the hon. member has referred but generally in connection with our environmental studies. With respect to the west coast route we also have a study under way at the present time with regard to additional navigational aids and various forms and devices that might make the route safer. This study is not completed, but when it is I see no reason why it should not be made available to the House.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister if the information which his department has already collected as to the possible damage to the fishing industry and to the coast of British Columbia has been transmitted to the government of the United States, indicating the Canadian government's concern and the Canadian people's concern regarding the possible ecological damage to the west coast?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, the normal channel for the transmission of such information would be through our own Department of External Affairs. The Department of Transport has certainly made all of the data available to that and other departments of the government, and I am sure that at least in part it has formed the basis of the communications and the fears that have been expressed already by that department.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct one further supplementary question to the right hon. Prime Minister. In view of the fact that the Secretary of State for External Affairs has been corresponding with the United States Secretary of State regarding a possible meeting, may I first ask the Prime Minister if such a meeting has definitely been set, and if in the meantime the Canadian government has made any representations that the TAPS program not be proceeded with because of the possible dangers to the west coast of Canada?