

Privilege—Mr. Coates

Right Hon. John G. Diefenbaker. I do not accept that. I believe the government should not try to use the device of a board to squirm out of its responsibility to the people of Canada to accept this home. I believe we should hear today a clear statement as to what its intentions are. If its intentions are to refuse a gift from a former prime minister of this country, let it be known. Let the people know.

I can give the government the guarantee that the home will be retained. It will be a museum open to Canadians. It is terribly important that all Canadians know that the Government of Canada accepts the gift of a former great Canadian of his home, that it will be under the auspices of the government and all the people of Canada so that Canadians today, tomorrow and forever will be able to see that home as a memorial and a tribute to a great Canadian, indeed one of the greatest Canadians who has ever lived in the 114-year history of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak briefly on the same question of privilege. I listened carefully to the hon. gentleman's remarks, and I would like to comment on one or two of the points he made, particularly because of my desire to clarify, in case there should be any misinterpretation or in case I might have misinterpreted his remarks.

At one point I thought I heard the hon. member indicate that this decision which has been taken might be one which reflects on the role of Mr. Diefenbaker as a former Prime Minister or in Canadian public life. If I understood the hon. member correctly to say that, I want to assure him and the House immediately that nothing could be further from the truth. I doubt if there are many members of this House who had more affection and respect for the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker than I had, and I am sure the Historic Sites and Monuments Board is extremely conscious of his contribution to Canadian history and the high esteem in which he was held by so many Canadians.

● (1520)

The fact of the matter is that a set of policy guidelines has been established, not by the government but by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. If I understood the hon. gentleman correctly, he is urging me to overturn the recommendation made to me by a distinguished group of historians and citizens whose purpose is to come directly to a determination of this kind of difficult and sometimes delicate question. If the hon. member wants to say that the responsibility rests with me rather than with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, I would have to accept it; but I would also have to say to him frankly that I would be extremely loath to overturn a decision taken by such a disinterested—and I do not mean uninterested—body, and that this kind of decision should be expressly removed, not only from partisan judgment but even from the

possible public interpretation that a partisan judgment was being applied by a minister.

The reasons which the board put forward for rejecting this generous offer were not only that it was in conflict with this request—

An hon. Member: "Bequest".

Mr. Roberts: I accept the hon. member's correction. The reason the board did not accede to this bequest was, first of all, that it did not correspond to the established policy because it felt there were more appropriate ways of recognizing Mr. Diefenbaker's contribution. It should be underlined also that the board felt that the purpose of the bequest, the kind of museum which was envisaged, could not appropriately be fulfilled at the Rockcliffe site. I think it would be foolhardy and wrong for me to overturn the professional judgment exercised by very competent people.

I will read the remarks of the hon. gentleman carefully, but on the basis of what I heard during my attentive listening to his remarks, I do not think it would be appropriate today to overturn the decision taken by the board; and I do hope that nothing in his remarks could be interpreted as undermining or attacking the decision which the board has taken.

Madam Speaker: I will not hear any more speakers on this question of privilege because the first speaker, the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester (Mr. Coates), did not make, in my view, any kind of argument which would indicate to me that there was a question of privilege in the point he raised. Yesterday the hon. member pursued this matter in the proper way by asking a question of the minister during the question period, and he received some answers. Obviously he is not very satisfied with those answers, so today he wants to push the point. That is probably quite legitimate, but it should not be done under the guise of a question of privilege, which it is not. Therefore, I will not hear any more speakers on the ground that this is not a question of privilege.

When the first speaker on a question of privilege does not succeed in convincing me that there is even a hint that there might be a breach of privilege, my policy is not to hear second speakers. So my ruling on this question is that the hon. member has a complaint, which is probably very legitimate; that is not for me to determine. But complaints have to be aired at other times and not through questions of privilege.

I have notice of another question of privilege from the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae). I will hear it now.

MR. RAE—LETTER FROM MR. KAPLAN RESPECTING
MULTICULTURALISM GRANT

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, now that the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) is in the House, I want to indicate to him that Mr. Ian Martin, who is one of the executive officers of the Canadian Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language and who is a constituent of