

The issue is whether there was a breach of privilege. The Hon. Member who raised the point did not accuse any particular Member of Parliament as being the source of the leak. Leaks are a way of political life in this institution, and in institutions across Canada at the provincial level. As members of the opposition, we are often in receipt of so-called leaks, or brown envelopes from civil servants, Conservative Members of Parliament, and elsewhere, regarding the confidential activities of either the Government or Ministers of the Crown. When the Conservative Party was in opposition it too was a recipient of leaks, or brown envelopes.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) has said something that all Hon. Members are very well aware of, that there is constant communication between Members of Parliament, those in the public service, the media and others. The Hon. Member for York South—Weston put his finger on the point when he stated that the issue is whether, under these circumstances, there has been a breach of privilege. This afternoon a lot of time could be spent casting around, going back in history, some of which would be factual, and some of which might be fanciful.

I wish to ask the Hon. Member to come back to the point he so excellently made, that is, that under these circumstances, as the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake put them to the Chair, and the Hon. Member for York South—Weston is absolutely right, the Hon. Member who brought the point of privilege did not accuse anyone, has there been a breach of privilege. The point is a narrow one, but it is important. That is, if there was an *in camera* meeting, and if all Hon. Members entered into that *in camera* meeting understanding that that was the situation, what is the obligation then on Hon. Members? That is the point. The Hon. Member for York South—Weston has perceived that point perfectly well, and I ask him to continue.

Mr. Nunziata: By raising the point of privilege the Chairman of the committee has confirmed the contents of the particular media report, and he has not denied that the media report was inaccurate. By so raising the point, he has confirmed the accuracy of the report.

Mr. McCain: I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) is speaking on a point of privilege. Unless the point of order you are raising is of very great importance, I would prefer that the Hon. Member be allowed to finish his comments.

Mr. Nunziata: As I indicated, by raising the point, there is a confirmation of the accuracy of the Canadian Press report. Be that as it may, the question is whether there has been a breach of privilege. There is no question that if there was a leak there has been a breach of trust; the trust that exists between Members of Parliament, whether they are Conservative, New Democratic, or Liberal.

Privilege—Mr. Holtmann

In certain cases there is a need to have *in camera* meetings of committees. In my view, only in very extreme circumstances should there be *in camera* meetings of committees. There must be compelling reasons why there should be an *in camera* meeting. In this particular case, there was obviously a need for an *in camera* meeting because members of the committee were trying to develop and articulate a committee position on the issue in question.

There is precious little that the Chair can do, if you conclude, as I have concluded, that there was a leak. Was there a breach of privilege? If there was, what does the Chair do? The matter is referred to committee. Do the Hon. Members opposite, and the Member who raised the particular point of privilege, suggest that we should have a type of Senate subcommittee investigation, call in a special investigator, call people before the bar, under oath, and go through a process of cross-examination and investigate each and every Member of Parliament and determine where the leak came from? We cannot do that. In the House we are all considered to be honourable members. An investigation would serve no useful purpose. If a member of the committee stood up and pleaded *mea culpa, mea culpa*, then we could wrap that person's knuckles, and that would be the end of the matter.

If the Member who raised the particular point of privilege wishes to accuse a Member of Parliament of breaching the privilege, then it should be done up front, and the person should be named. There are consequences that follow if he is wrong in terms of his allegations. But I regret the method by which the Hon. Member, and Conservative Members, by a process of elimination have chosen to point fingers towards the opposition benches.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, should you find that there has been a breach of privilege, I would move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann):

That the matter of the breach of confidence or trust by a Member of the Government Operations Committee in communicating the contents of the committee report to a member of the media prior to its presentation in the House be considered by the committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to assist Hon. Members when I feel that it is appropriate to do so. In these circumstances it is appropriate that the Hon. Member who raised the point of privilege be the Member to actually move the motion. I am sure that all Hon. Members do not mind if the Chair makes sure that what is being done is procedurally sound. If it is the disposition of the House, we can take it that we agree that that is the case.

● (1540)

Ms. Copps: Everyone agrees.

Mr. Keeper: On what are we agreeing?