

Privilege—Mr. Nielsen

likes to take shortcuts. The Prime Minister is so busy settling the world's problems, he has no time for what is going on in his own Office.

Within weeks of the new Leader of the Conservative Party being chosen, emissaries were on their way to Washington to dig up information. They were not looking for biographical information. We could have supplied that; we would have been pleased to do so. They were looking for material which would cast the Leader of this Party in a derogatory light, and they were doing it with public officials at public expense. The fact that they found nothing does not detract one iota from the underhanded, unparliamentary nature of their desperate action, for that is the only way that it can be described.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: We have had Members of Parliament threatened in the performance of their duties. Members who engaged in the House in criticism of tax collection methods of the Department of National Revenue were faced with a scarcely-veiled hint about publication of their tax positions. We had a threat in the House by a Minister, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde), who suggested that he would pull out letters which would cast a derogatory light on the Leader of the Opposition. This House, Sir, has been most jealous of its privileges, as has the British House before it. Threatening a Member in the performance of his or her duty is so serious that it forms the subject of a statutory prohibition. Now we have hanging over us on this side of the aisle the threat that the vast resources of government, as was pointed out by the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), are being used to dredge up material against the Opposition including its Leader.

It is not a large step from dredging to fabricating. Those who are capable of hiring investigators to look into the activities of the Leader of the Opposition are equally capable of creating material. Would it not have been more appropriate for the Prime Minister to investigate the background of his own proposed Cabinet Ministers before their appointment, rather than to conduct the resources of government in this direction?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: We have already had a case where correspondence contradicting specifically the impression which the Minister of Finance sought to leave was not produced. That, Sir, is known as suppression, and I speak specifically of the letter he failed to produce dated November 30. This latest infringement on the privileges of a Member is one of the most serious which has ever been brought before the House.

The Leader of the Opposition is an officer of the House. He fulfils a function recognized constitutionally in Canadian and British parliamentary law and precedent in the same way as the position of the Prime Minister is recognized. It is his constitutional duty to attack and to criticize government. The present Leader of the Opposition has carried out that function in a reasonable, honest and fair-minded way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: No one can accuse him for being overly partisan or carrying partisanship to the extremes. In my personal viewpoint, he has been moderate to a fault.

What is the reward for this restraint that he has practised? Threats, production of documents, secret and clandestine investigations. Surely this is one of the most serious revelations ever to come before a House of Commons in any parliamentary democracy.

The investigators have been hired with public funds, public servants suborned, secret trips authorized in order to dredge up anything, inside the country or out, which might reflect upon the conduct of the Leader of the Opposition while he was the head of a company in private industry. Coming on top of the publication by the Minister of Finance of private communications, the message is clear to Canadians in business and industry or to those of us who attempt to serve our constituents in Parliament. We are all subject to being looked into, we are all subject to being harassed, we are all subject to being investigated or spied upon by a Government which feels free to use the apparatus of the Public Service for partisan purposes.

• (1510)

We know what happened to the Special Recovery Fund: \$300 million of public moneys turned over to Grit members as a patronage dispensary controlled by the Prime Minister's Office. How far has that politicization gone? Now the subversion of the Prime Minister's Office, the highest office in the land, which ought to be at the service of all Canadians without distinction as to the political conviction, is being used as a kind of command post for espionage against members of the Opposition. Is it any wonder that Canadians throughout this country have serious qualms about entrusting a new security apparatus to the kind of people capable of carrying out the kind of operations Mr. Axworthy has been masterminding in the Prime Minister's Office?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: It was from the Prime Minister's Office that the slush goodies were being dispensed. It was under Mr. Axworthy's direction that the funds were made available for a project here and a project there. Curiously, all of these projects which came fluttering out of Mr. Axworthy's office—and there was some doubt whether it was his or the Prime Minister's—all came fluttering down like manna from heaven, to land where? In Gritland. Mr. Axworthy makes no bones of the politicization of the Prime Minister's Office. It has become an anteroom for the National Liberal Federation. The only criterion of qualification is the degree of Gritism inherent in the person seeking favours. We have seen this politicization—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: They laugh over there. That displays the head space that they are in.