

Privilege—Mr. Holtmann

The Hon. Member referred to Beuchesne's Fifth Edition, Section 628 on page 199, where it says that the publication of *in camera* proceedings would be an offence. I interpret that to mean that if the words on a particular matter in a preliminary report were actually published and disseminated in the community we would have destroyed the purpose of an *in camera* meeting. I would like to come back to that in a moment, but I would ask you to rule that the revelation of a recorded vote under any circumstances at all is not the same thing as the publication of a committee's proceedings. It just simply cannot be. It would be stretching to absurdity the idea of what is a proceeding and what is a publication of that proceeding.

Beuchesne's makes it clear that the purpose of an *in camera* meeting is for Members to feel free to negotiate, discuss, deliberate, and compromise without the glare of publicity. In this particular meeting under discussion the negotiations had broken down. Discussion was over. Deliberations had ended. The possibility of a compromise was non-existent. Under those circumstances a vote was taken and I, as a member of that committee, asked that the vote be recorded.

We are publicly elected, we function under public scrutiny in almost all circumstances except those rare occasions when an *in camera* meeting is necessary. Such a meeting is necessary because once in a while we must negotiate, discuss and deliberate in private. Once we vote on an important issue, say whether or not a report will be presented to Parliament, then I believe the reason for an *in camera* meeting no longer applies. Our votes and the results of those votes are for the public record and the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River has made a strong and eloquent case in support of that.

Therefore, I conclude that there is not and cannot be in this instance in any way a genuine question of privilege in the charges brought to the House by the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake against the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River. I call upon you to dismiss it quickly and summarily.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join briefly in this debate to assist my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann). I do not do so with any pleasure. I do it with a certain amount of distaste because I find this matter to be very offensive.

I submit, as has my colleague, that the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry) breached a trust, a confidentiality which all Members enter into when, as Members of Parliament, we gather together *in camera* to discuss matters which are better discussed, because it provides better results, *in camera*. They give a Member the freedom to negotiate, discuss, deliberate, and sometimes compromise without the glare of publicity which might add to the difficulties of agreeing to reports when it is desirable that those proceedings be treated in confidence.

The committee made the decision to negotiate and meet in private. Then, lo and behold, the next day the deliberations of the committee, and I will get to whether or not a vote is a deliberation in a minute, were brought forward in a partisan manner by the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River in an effort to embarrass his colleagues.

I think even if you argue that a vote is not part of the proceedings of the House of Commons, one is entitled, since my colleague stands in my opinion convicted by his own words, to look at the words which were used. The question is, in discussing what he alleges was not a part of the proceedings, that is to say a vote, whether or not the words that were used imputed motives and put his colleagues on that committee in an embarrassing position. He entered into private discussions and negotiations with them in the give and take which we all know takes place and which we hope will continue to take place among Members of this House in committee.

● (1150)

First there is the platitude; I have and continue to hold the view that partisan concerns and parochial attitudes do nothing to further the cause of Canada's first people. Then, to swing from the platitude to the innuendo; his colleagues sat, not in an office tower without a microphone, but in one of the many *in camera* meetings which take place here. By inference or by innuendo his colleagues are thus convicted. By the way, I include my colleagues in the Liberal Party. They are included in that partisan and parochial attitude.

Then he goes on to say that it was an anonymous office. Everyone knows that it was not an anonymous office. If one wants to find out where the *in camera* meetings of today are being held, one goes to the parliamentary calendar to check and it says "*in camera*". The word "anonymous" is another innuendo or another inference that this was nefarious.

Then we move on to the allegation that his colleagues on the committee, including my Liberal colleague, abrogated their responsibilities to aboriginal people. What a damning comment to make about a colleague.

He also stated that they voted to block the report. He used the word "block", not make a decision because they did not like what was in it.

Even if you, Mr. Speaker, do not find a case of privilege here, I suggest that it is pretty damning, because what we have in this place is a breach of trust. A breach of privilege causes it go to committee and causes a final decision, if you so find, Mr. Speaker. However, there is one thing that, once we lose it in this place, if not forever, is very, very difficult to regain, and that is the trust of one's colleagues. No matter whether they are in one's Party or not, when one loses that trust, one has lost something—

Mr. Penner: Speak to the question of privilege; don't preach a sermon.