

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 10, 1969

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. KNOWLES (WINNIPEG NORTH CENTRE)—
TAX REFORM—ISSUING BY MINISTER OF
FINANCE OF ALLEGED PROPAGANDA MA-
TERIAL

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege of which I have given Your Honour notice as required by the Standing Orders. Yesterday the leader of this party received a letter from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) which included a question that made it necessary for the letter to be referred to our party. We therefore considered the letter at our caucus meeting this morning and it is on behalf of our caucus that I raise this question of privilege, but I believe that it affects members in all parts of the House.

The Minister of Finance, according to his letter which, as I say, was dated yesterday advises us that he has had prepared a set of ten coloured slides which can be used in presenting to those who are interested the proposals set out in the white paper on income tax reform. No doubt it could be argued that these slides are informational in character. Most of us on this side feel they are propaganda on the side of the government's position.

I hope to come as quickly as I can, Mr. Speaker, to the point that makes this matter not just a grievance, not just a complaint, but a question of parliamentary privilege. Before I do so may I say that the issue being raised at this time is not the merits or demerits of the white paper. We happen to think there are some good things in it—in fact, so good that I wish they could be brought into effect right away. But that is not the issue. The issue in the first place is the use of government funds to propagandize government proposals that have not yet been adopted by Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I hear some ohs and groans of various kinds on the other side of the House. Mr. Speaker, I

suggest that in this day, when we are hearing about Information Canada and about all kinds of ways of conditioning the people of this country to accept the government's ideas, we have to pause and think about an arrangement of this kind.

It so happens, Mr. Speaker, that in 1955 and 1956 when the Canada Pension Plan was before Parliament, and I happened to be one of its most ardent supporters—

Mr. Benson: 1965.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I thank my hon. friend for the correction. Yes, 1965 and 1966. What's ten years?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): To you?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I remember that there was a terrific propaganda campaign carried on by the insurance companies against that proposal, through the medium of advertisements in newspapers and in other ways. As I say, I was an ardent supporter of the plan, and I did not like that unfair campaign against it. I spoke to the then Minister of National Health and Welfare about it and asked her if there was not something the government could do to offset it. I well remember the Hon. Judy LaMarsh telling me she had thought about this and had made inquiries but had been informed it was not proper, it was not legal, to spend government money in support of a government proposition that had not yet been adopted by the House. And yet, Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what is now being done.

Government money is being spent on these coloured slides, and most of us know how expensive coloured slides are. We have no idea what other expenses are being incurred. We have no idea what advertising agency may have been engaged for this purpose. The whole thing, as I say, Mr. Speaker, is contrary to the accepted practice that public money should not be spent to propagandize government proposals that have not yet been adopted by Parliament.

An hon. Member: A good job is being done.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend says a good job is being done. I am prepared to agree with that and I am