

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, July 23, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

MR. FORTIN—PROTEST AGAINST STATEMENT
BY PRIME MINISTER ON C.B.C.
FRENCH NETWORK

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Pursuant to Standing Order 17 (2), I have given notice to the Chair of a question of privilege I intended to raise at the beginning of the sitting, following the extremely serious statements made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) last night on the C.B.C.'s French radio and television network, that is that members of the House of Commons are rather old fogies.

He stated moreover that parliament is an antiquated institution and on the whole, his statement suggested that he feels nothing good is done by parliament and that it is only a waste of time for which the members of the opposition are responsible.

To make it worse, the injustice results from the fact that the C.B.C.'s French network was not fair enough to ask for an account from a member of the opposition to counteract the Prime Minister's gratuitous and extremely serious statements.

In my opinion it is sheer dishonesty, a breach of the members' privileges and of the right to information of the Canadian people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, that is the essence of my question of privilege.

In view of the implications of the application of closure in accordance with standing order 33, considering that closure is seldom resorted to and that most often its application is odious, considering that those who resort to it must, from a parliamentary standpoint, be held responsible for the consequences, and considering that the people of Canada have a right to get accurate information, I say, Mr. Speaker, that the whole matter affects the right of the people of Canada to such accurate and fair information.

Indeed, Canadians must be informed of the fact that the opposition members are doing an honest job, not as dotards or simpletons but as responsible men. I suggest that the privileges of the people are being dangerously affected. It is the responsibility of every member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition to cast some light on this subject in order to bring the Right Hon. Prime Minister to express his opinions more specifically in respect of the disparagement campaign he has undertaken against the supreme, democratic institution which is parliament.

Mr. Speaker, as long as the rights and privileges of the representatives of Canadians in the House of Commons are not properly respected by the Right Hon. Prime Minister, we will have to conclude that this is a pure and simple belittling of parliament, made deliberately and with full awareness by the government, and I suggest this situation should not be tolerated by any parliamentarian worthy of the name.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière will appreciate that, even if the question of privilege were well taken—which I doubt—I must take into account the fact that no motion has been introduced in the house. The question is not debatable and I cannot rule in the circumstances on whether or not the question of privilege was in order.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

I willingly abide by your ruling which I think is sensible. But my purpose was to call the attention of the house to some unfortunate statements.

I should like however to point out to you, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, that every time a member of the Ralliement Créditiste rises to speak, the members on the other side, and particularly those immediately opposite, keep making a lot of noise, thus proving the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is right—

Mr. Speaker: Order. If this is any comfort to the hon. member, I can assure him that I am actually listening to him rather than to the interruption he just mentioned.