

Motion for Adjournment

The minister replied:

So far as my giving instructions is concerned, Mr. Speaker, it is not.

That statement on the part of the minister represents the facts, so why not have a discussion on the matter? We now have before the house the allegation that there was tinkering with the evidence, that pages were deleted and others substituted while in the possession of the minister. Can there be anything more serious to the future of democracy under our parliamentary system than the suggestion—even the suggestion—that this has taken place?

Surely the Prime Minister, being the custodian of the prerogatives of parliament, should rise and say: This matter will receive attention; we are not going to wait until months hence to meet the desires of anybody in this house for postponement. This matter is of first importance. It cannot be brushed aside by the simple statement, "Well, this is not the fact." It must be met; otherwise parliament will be a caricature. When a minister makes a statement, that statement must be the truth when it represents not an argument but a statement of fact.

Mr. Hellyer: Hear, hear.

● (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. Diefenbaker: Today we heard the allegation made by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona that Admiral Landymore has produced an affidavit in addition to his copyright article. Why did he do that? Not to prevent the House of Commons from discussing a matter of transcendent importance to the security and integrity of members of parliament.

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Speaker, if members of the opposition would be willing to formulate a charge that I tampered with the evidence of the committee and that I misled parliament, I would be pleased to ask for unanimous consent of the house that that charge be referred at once to the committee on privileges and elections. This would be done on the clear understanding that the person making the charge would place his seat in jeopardy if the charge is proved to be false.

Mr. Starr: Will the minister resign if found guilty?

Mr. Ricard: Stand up and say it.

Mr. Nugent: It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the minister did not hear the charge I have already levelled on my responsibility and standing in my place as required by the

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

rules. I will read the charge to him again and I intend to follow it with a motion that it be referred to the committee on privileges and elections. I do not think any charge could be clearer than this one. It is that the Minister of Defence has breached the privileges of this house by tampering with a witness in regard to the evidence to be given before a committee of this house, the witness being Rear Admiral W. M. Landymore, the committee being the standing committee on national defence, and the evidence in question being the admiral's brief presented to the committee on June 23, 1966.

With regard to the seriousness of the offence, I have looked at the rules, Mr. Speaker, and I find that whenever a charge is made and proved false it is up to the house to decide what the punishment should be. I have little doubt that the house regards this charge as very serious. That is why, before making this very serious charge, I was very careful to make sure that I had evidence. In fact, having obtained this evidence I would have been negligent and derelict in my duty if I had not brought it before the house.

We are now in the position, Mr. Speaker, that if Your Honour's ruling on my question of privilege had prevailed it would have been most unfair if I had not been allowed to present part of my argument or all of it, just as it would be unfair to the minister if he were not given time to reply to the charge. I was going to suggest what the minister has already suggested, that in justice to the minister it is not a just solution to leave the matter as it is with only half the argument on the record, and I do not think any member in the house would stand in the way of a just and equitable solution to this matter which can only be achieved by allowing a complete hearing of the charges for which I am responsible and a hearing on the minister's action for which he is responsible.

I would therefore ask, Mr. Speaker, if I may be allowed, that you request unanimous consent of the house to the raising of the question of privilege and that you allow a full discussion of it together with the motion that it be referred to the committee on privileges and elections. I would be content to allow this matter to go directly to the committee on privileges and elections without further debate.

Either way, Mr. Speaker, I do think that a request for unanimous consent to discuss this very important question of privilege would meet with the approval of the house because