

Privilege—Mr. Taylor

to call it the York East constituency office and purported to be the member of Parliament for that district. That gentleman subsequently sat in this House for a brief period. I did not complain about his conduct. I would say it is a democratic right of parties and individuals in this country to associate with whomever they please.

The hon. member spoke about press releases being issued but I submit that he is really talking about some censorship of the press and is denying the people of his constituency an alternative viewpoint from Ottawa than the one it receives from its current member of Parliament.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I want to deal with the quite important question of privilege raised by my colleague from Bow River (Mr. Taylor). In commencing my short remarks I want to say how much I regret that the spokesman for the government, the parliamentary secretary, treated so lightly a question which you may well find goes to the root of the privileges of members of this House of Commons.

I should say in passing that I find it alarming, although not strange in the mouth of a Liberal, that he should find it unusual that the leader of a party in a parliamentary system should be found sitting in the House of Commons of Canada at four o'clock in the afternoon. It is our judgment, as it was in government, that leaders of the opposition and prime ministers, have an obligation to sit in this House of Commons, to take part in the debates of this institution and to show a respect for this institution, rather than treating it as a place where no one congregates.

Let me come to some points at issue here. One important matter at issue is that the parliamentary secretary, speaking on behalf of the government, said that there is a long tradition of ministers of the Crown using their exempt staff for partisan political purposes. He obviously knows whereof he speaks. He is obviously much more aware of the details of that tradition than we on this side of the House. I think, particularly in the interest of ensuring that public funds are spent for public purposes and not simply for the purposes of the Liberal party, it would be useful for us to have laid upon the table of the House of Commons an elaboration of that tradition which the hon. member claims is so well known. If exempt staff are being used as a matter of practice, funded by the Crown of Canada, to advance the partisan interests of the Liberal Party of Canada, as the parliamentary secretary has just said, then it is important that this House of Commons and the public of Canada know the details of that practice and the extent of the subsidy by the Canadian taxpayer of the political operations of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Let me come to another question of cost raised by the hon. member for Bow River. It is a matter of some real substance and has to do with who pays the extra costs incurred by a so-called twin when that twin visits another constituency in the country. As the hon. member for Bow River said, if the individual member carries that cost himself, that is fine; if the Liberal Party of Canada carries that cost, that is fine. But if those costs are borne by the public purse, if the public purse is

expected to subsidize the personal expenditures of a twinned constituency of a Liberal member of Parliament, then that is an extension of the practice of subsidy for partisan Liberal purposes by the public purse of Canada. That extension of that principle should be on the record. The fact of that subsidy and the extent of that subsidy should be well known and should be on the record of this House of Commons.

It is not something that is authorized by this Parliament in the way that the budgets of research offices of all parties are authorized. It is not something that is authorized in the way certain expenditures of leaders of various parties are authorized. It is a new expenditure and a new practice; it is a subsidy for clearly partisan purposes. If that is occurring, then the House of Commons and the public of Canada, the people who pay the bills, have a right to know that it is occurring. They have a right to know the costs involved. Since it is an unauthorized expenditure it may very well, as the hon. member for Bow River suggests, breach the privileges of members of this House.

The far more important question, however, that we have to deal with here, Madam Speaker, has to do with the treatment accorded documents conveyed in confidence to an elected member of Parliament by his constituents. The hon. member for Bow River represents, among others, a national parks community which has extensive and confidential relations with the Department of the Environment and a branch of Parks Canada. He represents various farmers and very many other individuals who, by the nature and extent of government involvement in our society, now have their private affairs very much intertwined with the activities and policies of the Government of Canada. Those citizens have a right to know that communications they have with their elected member of Parliament which he passes on to ministers of the Crown will be treated confidentially and will not be passed on to someone designated by a minister as a twin. They have a right to know that confidences passed to a member by his constituents and from that member to the Government of Canada will not be violated.

We have no guarantee that this is presently the case. Indeed, there is some suspicion that the very purpose of this twinning operation may be an attempt to have people not elected by the electors of the west, and by the electors of Bow River in this case, intruding and placing themselves between the electors of Bow River and the member of Parliament for Bow River and, consequently, being an instrument by which that intrusion might be realized. It could very well be that passage by a minister of the Crown of confidential information conveyed by a constituent or by the member of Parliament for Bow River to another member of Parliament could occur. That would be a very serious breach of the privileges of this House and it is one that is properly raised by the hon. member for Bow River. It is a matter that troubles all of us very deeply, Madam Speaker.

Twinning is a new practice; it has not been done before. Perhaps we have not had a situation before where there has been a Government of Canada without representation in three of the provinces and two territories of the country. This is a