

Presence in Gallery

Most of his constituents support an increase in allowance for MPs he said. Although he has received "two letters from ding-dongs" against an increase, the majority support better pay benefits, he said.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, that is another example of malicious or irresponsible reporting. Here is what I actually said, and I quote from the text given to me by the committee's clerk:

As far as I am concerned, I sold to my constituents the principle that we had established last year. The vast majority supported what the Parliament of Canada did. They understand the importance of a good remuneration for MPs. Except for two naive types who wrote me anonymous letters, I am pleased to report that the vast majority of my voters supported our decision.

On the one hand, you have my words: I mentioned that two naive types wrote me anonymous letters, on the other hand, you have an article in the *Globe and Mail* which translates my words by "Two letters from ding-dongs".

Mr. Speaker, there is a difference which should not be overlooked. The newspaperman failed to mention that the letters were unsigned, which changes the whole matter entirely, and does not mean, incidentally, that I did not receive any signed correspondence. Furthermore I wish to emphasize that "naive types" cannot be translated by "ding-dongs".

Therefore my statement was seriously if not maliciously distorted. The reporter and the press agency which show such a blatant disregard for professional ethics and display such shamelessness towards the public that they consider gullible, ought to be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections to support their stand.

[English]

It is time this House dealt with the accredited fiction writers in the press gallery.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Corbin: To use the words of an eminent member of the press gallery, Richard Gwynn, "The press needs critics, it is getting just too smug."

[Translation]

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne):

That this matter be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections for consideration.

● (1510)

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question raised by the hon. member for Victoria-Madawaska is a very important one, and if I were to hold that a *prima facie* case existed and that the matter ought to be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections it would obviously be a very popular decision. But the difficulty is that, in my opinion, it would not be consistent with the precedents which have guided us in this House for a very long time and which were strengthened only recently by the extensive work of the committee on privileges of the British House with particular reference to the rights of journalists where a contest is exhibited between those who write about parliament and those who are elected to it. In my opinion, wherever possible the decision ought to come

[Mr. Corbin.]

down in favour of the freedom of those who write about parliament to say almost at will what they wish about it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: There has really never been an occasion on which an hon. member has been deprived of the opportunity, when there is a grievance of this sort, to air that grievance. Whether or not it constitutes strictly a question of privilege, there has never been a time when the hon. member concerned did not have the opportunity to raise the question, to air his grievance and to make it well known, as the hon. member for Victoria-Madawaska has done today. Other members who might have wished to take part in the discussion could have done so.

However, it will remain my view that a fundamental right is involved here equal, at least, if not greater, than the special privileges which surround the rights of members, who really ought to claim privilege only if their opportunity to operate as members of the House of Commons is actually interfered with. Certainly, the right to comment and express to the public what takes place here is an aspect of the freedom of the press which is one of the fundamental rights of our society and one which ought not to be interfered with, in my view, unless it is in fact in contempt of this institution.

The expressions of opinion put forward by the author in this case have been commented upon forcefully and, I would say, most ably by the hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria whose statement met with the general approval of the members of the House. He put his case extremely well and I do not think any further action by the House is needed to put it in its proper context. He has been congratulated by other hon. members and, in my opinion, deservedly. But I feel that in the interest of the public who, after all, have a very large stake in what takes place here, and in the interests of the freedom of the press, the matter ought not to go any further.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Today, during the question period, Your Honour recognized me for the purpose of asking a question. I had mentioned to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration that I would be asking a question on the Steve Badger case. I thought this was especially appropriate in view of the fact that there were representatives of Canada's Olympics team in the gallery. Noting that the minister had left the House for a few minutes, I took the usual course of action, having informed him I would be asking the question before, and asked that my question be deferred until later in the question period. I know other members of the House have taken a similar course of action, and while Your Honour might say, I know, that other members were standing at three o'clock, I wonder whether, in view of the circumstances which prevailed, I might be allowed to ask my question.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Provencher does, indeed, have a point well taken and a rather special case. There was great pressure during the question period today and, regrettably, only a very small number of questioners were able to be recognized. I did, in fact, recognize the hon.