

Privilege

Minister of Finance. The meeting took place February 28, 1989”.

“In response to Mr. John Manley, Ottawa South, in the House of Commons you quoted me as saying at that consultation: ‘We agree with the Economic Council that people with over \$50,000 of income should have their OAS taxed back’ ”.

“It has been the consistent position of One Voice that the clawback is a serious threat to universality of Canada’s social benefit programs and we have never supported the measure. I know that I personally never made such a comment”.

“We have contacted the Economic Council of Canada and they have been unable to locate any report which makes a reference to the clawback or the \$50,000 threshold. What concerns us more is that the clawback was not announced until the budget was released in April. We wonder how discussion of the clawback or the \$50,000 threshold could have taken place in February before it had been announced in April”.

“Your reference to our organization and to my supposed comments in particular as supporting the clawback have created a mistaken impression in the House. We insist that you clarify this error as soon as possible”.

The issues of privilege are these: first, it would seem that Mrs. Woodsworth, the author of this letter on behalf of One Voice is indicating to the minister that he has either inadvertently or advertently misled the House in answering the question on Thursday.

I think this is a very important matter of the privileges of the House, that the House be given fully truthful and correct information.

And related to that is the minister’s refusal to table the document from which he was—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That matter I must remind the member has already been settled by the Chair. The member has the floor.

Mr. Manley: The second issue of privilege is that of the use of the House of Commons as a forum in which to use in debate the confidential advice given in pre-budget meetings with the Minister of Finance. Many groups and organizations are invited to meet with the minister prior

to a budget being completed and tabled in the House of Commons, this group among them.

What has happened here is that this chamber was used to take the words given in a confidential session where there was no transcript of the meeting held and to use them in debate in an apparently, at least as far as the organization to which the words were attributed is concerned, misleading fashion.

This can only undermine the pre-budget consultative process and I believe is therefore an offence of the privileges of the House of Commons because of this chamber being used as a forum in which to take these private and confidential submissions and make them public.

That completes my submissions, Mr. Speaker.

• (1230)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister may or may not wish to answer, but the Chair does not feel it is necessary for the minister to answer.

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Privatization and Regulatory Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to my colleague from Ottawa South who is debating facts on a point between a group known as One Voice and their president, and the meeting that was held and the understanding of what the Minister of Finance heard at that meeting. We are very aware that One Voice has changed its stand since that meeting. I think it is incumbent upon us to let the people know the type of advice we get at these meetings when people say they did not give us that advice when, in fact, they did.

I indicated to the House on December 8 that I was not quoting from a document during question period on December 7. I had a one-page note in front of me that I was referring to. First of all, the member has not brought this up at the earliest possible opportunity. Second, he has not given the Minister of Finance an opportunity to reply to the letter that One Voice very conveniently sent to the member before the minister had seen it, and has not given the minister a chance to reply to that letter.

I believe that the point of privilege is frivolous, it has wasted a tremendous amount of time in this House and the hon. member should get on to more important things