

Privilege—Mr. Thorson

The house resumed at 2.30 o'clock.

PRIVILEGE—MR. THORSON

Mr. J. T. THORSON (Winnipeg South Centre): I rise to a question of privilege. On Saturday the leader of the opposition (Mr. Bennett) made certain remarks with regard to myself which are quite inaccurate. On page 4088 of Hansard he is reported as having made this statement with regard to myself:

He himself is a member of the profession; he assisted in the prosecution of those who originated the effort to establish a soviet in the city of Winnipeg. He was one of the prosecuting counsel.

I might quote several other inaccurate statements made by the leader of the opposition with regard to the part which I played in the prosecutions which followed the failure of the strike of 1919 in Winnipeg, but I cite this merely as an instance of the many inaccuracies of which he was guilty.

Mr. BENNETT: That is not privilege. The hon. member can direct attention to specific items in regard to himself, but these blanket charges do not constitute privilege.

Mr. SPEAKER: Would the hon. gentleman quote the words, because strictly speaking, a question of privilege is only with regard to character. This may be a personal explanation.

Mr. THORSON: I made that remark in an effort to save the time of the house. There are several other inaccuracies which I shall now cite. Hansard, on page 4090, reports the leader of the opposition as saying:

This was brought about to some extent, through the efforts made by the hon. gentleman who has just spoken, in the legal knowledge he brought to bear upon the prosecution of the offenders. His knowledge and training as a lawyer helped and assisted in the securing of a conviction against some of them.

Then at page 4091 Hansard reports him as follows:

If the government had yielded readily to the pressure brought to bear upon it, it would have been unworthy of being a government, it would have been unworthy of supporting the prosecution carried on by the hon. gentleman as a lawyer.

At page 4092 Hansard reports my hon. friend as follows:

My hon. friend put this case. He said: Other employers take back their people and give them positions. Let us admit all that. That has nothing at all to do with this case. This is the body politic fighting for its life. This is the nation fighting for its existence. This is the struggle between constituted government

[Mr. Bennett.]

and bolshevism. It was a struggle between the municipal institutions at Winnipeg and the soviet form of government and that was the case put by my hon. friend in his prosecution. He may not have put it in those words, but that is the case he put and that is the case upon which a conviction was made.

The leader of the opposition in this manner attributed to me a leading part in the prosecutions that took place after the failure of the Winnipeg strike of 1919. I did not hold the exalted position which the hon. gentleman assigned to me. The case which went to the privy council was a conviction of one of the strike leaders for seditious conspiracy. That conviction was upheld in the court of appeal of Manitoba. An application was made to the privy council for leave to appeal. That application for leave to appeal was refused by the privy council. I had no part whatsoever in that particular prosecution. Subsequently a similar prosecution was instituted against six other men on a charge of seditious conspiracy. Five of these men were convicted and one of them, the hon. member for North Winnipeg (Mr. Heaps), was acquitted. With that prosecution I had nothing whatsoever to do. The only part which I played in the prosecutions after the failure of the strike at Winnipeg was in a very minor capacity. I acted as assistant crown prosecutor in the city of Winnipeg police court, and assisted in the prosecution of a number of men who were guilty of disturbances on the day when the shooting took place and the strike was finally broken. I took part in none of the major prosecutions with the exception of one. I was associated as junior counsel in the prosecution of Mr. F. J. Dixon, a respected citizen of Winnipeg for whom I have a high personal regard. Mr. F. J. Dixon was acquitted on the charge of seditious libel which was preferred against him. That was my connection with the prosecutions that followed the strike of 1919.

I am quite sure that the hon. leader of the opposition did not intentionally mislead the house, but I desire to put on record correctly the part which I took at that time. I am quite willing to believe that the hon. leader of the opposition when he spoke with regard to me as he did, spoke without knowledge of the facts.

Hon. R. B. BENNETT (Leader of the Opposition): The question of privilege to which the hon. gentleman has spoken is a question affecting the correctness of certain observations made with respect to a member of this house on Saturday last. After listening to the hon. gentleman, and reading from