

Privilege

I submit this action by the RCMP raises the issue as to whether this action I have outlined by RCMP officers and those who gave them their instructions breach the privileges of this House. I am sure the officers in question were acting with the best of intentions, but the issue of parliamentary privilege still remains to be considered. I say the issue was there, even though it was possible for members of Parliament, in the case of myself and others, to walk up the hill to the Peace Tower and eventually for several others to ride in taxi cabs to the main entrance to the House of Commons. I say this because when I and a number of other members of Parliament first attempted to be driven by taxi cabs around the main driveway up to the Peace Tower, we were prevented from doing so by a road-block of RCMP cars and a large number of RCMP officers.

What do the authorities say in this regard. I refer you to Beauchesne's, fifth edition, page 35, citation 104 which states:

The time-honoured privilege of Members to have free and unimpeded access to the Parliament Buildings should be recognized even if there is some question as to the extension of the term "parliamentary precincts", and in particular whether the jurisdiction of the Speaker, exercised on behalf of Members, extends beyond the limits of the Parliament Buildings themselves.

In this case, the obstruction in question took place on the grounds of Parliament, just off the gate from Wellington Street, near the Centennial Flame.

I also ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take a look at Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice, Twentieth Edition, page 156, where there is the heading, "Molestation of Members while in the execution of their duties". Erskine May says:

It is a breach of privilege to molest a Member of either House while attending such House or when coming to or going from it—and on June 6, 1780, the Commons resolved, "that it is a gross breach of the privilege of this House for any person to obstruct and insult the Members of this House in coming to, or going from the House—

I repeat that I am sure the RCMP officers in question were acting with the best of intentions, but the fact is that when I and a number of other members of this House attempted to be driven up to the main entrance at the Peace Tower in taxi cabs, we were prevented from doing so by RCMP officers who had created a road-block of RCMP vehicles. I submit that this action falls four square with the accepted definitions of what is involved in preventing members from having access to the House of Commons. I submit that what we have here is a *prima*

facie breach of privilege. If you agree with me, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

I want to say, by way of conclusion, that I realize there are questions of security with which we ask the RCMP to be concerned. However, I say that in instances such as this, these matters should be worked out in consultation with the Speaker, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the RCMP, and no one instructing them should act as the officers in question did today, no matter what their intentions were. We have the potential for a very dangerous situation, where no matter what the intentions are, no matter how well-intentioned the officers may be, the result may well be to prevent members of the public, and as was the case here, members of Parliament from having access to the Parliament of Canada.

I do not think this is acceptable under any circumstances. I certainly do not think it is acceptable in this case, where large numbers of Canadians, in a peaceable way, wanted to carry out their long-standing privilege of demonstrating and expressing their views against a very unpopular government policy, the goods and services tax. I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that what happened amounted to a *prima facie* breach of privilege, and if you agree with me, I will be prepared to move the appropriate motion.

• (1510)

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, the point of my question of privilege is one of access, access by an elected representative, a member of Parliament, specifically this member of Parliament, to this place. There was a noon hour rally on Parliament Hill, a rally attended by Canadians who were very concerned about the GST, in fact, so concerned they were protesting the GST. Behind each one of them, I might add, there are thousands more who say that enough is enough.

Following this noon hour rally, members of Parliament who boarded taxis to return to the front door of the House were stopped by police on the lower road. My colleagues and I were denied access to the front door. I questioned an RCMP officer who told me, and I quote, "Potentially 295 MPs, if every one of them took a taxi to the Hill, they would disrupt the dignity of Parliament so bad it would be unbelievable". At this point, the officer said, "Mr. Member, if you would like a ride to the front of the House of Commons, I am offering you a ride." I was not aware of that. I will phone and ask if I have that same privilege available to me tomorrow morning from my apartment.