

Privilege—Mr. Hnatyshyn

general Conservative tactic and conduct and certainly not specifically to any members of parliament.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Cheap.

Mr. Lang: In the earlier one I did indeed, I think, describe exactly what I thought they did in the way of a tactic, in terms of talking one way in this House and talking another way outside the House. That did apply to members. But I am presuming that Your Honour does not indicate that that earlier reference is the unparliamentary one, so I do separate those two very completely.

Mr. Speaker: What I am saying is that the combination of the two references, so closely related, leads to a very clear suspicion, which the minister says is not the case. We accept the word of members in this House, but it leads to the clear impression that the two are tied together. He separates them in his mind, and I accept that; however, I would want the minister to make clear today the intent of the language he used, "lies and deceptions". I think we always have to be very careful. When we enter into that kind of language, we have to be absolutely clear that it is not in reference to members of the House of Commons, and I would want the minister now to make it absolutely clear that he was not making that reference in relation to members of the House of Commons.

Mr. Lang: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is what I meant to do in my previous intervention. I do not so intend.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, as the national Leader of the Progressive Conservative party and as a member of this House, I am responsible in quite general terms for the strategy of my party. It is that very strategy which was attacked by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) last night in the House of Commons.

[English]

I am quite prepared to accept the ruling which Your Honour has made and the retraction you have extracted from the Minister of Transport. I will accept that on the very narrow procedural grounds which are the grounds to which Your Honour, by necessity, is confined.

What is of greater concern to me here, as I am sure it is to all hon. members of the House of Commons, is that we know that in this House we set a standard which is followed elsewhere in the country and which forms attitudes toward the goodwill which exists among peoples and regions in this country and also toward the very delicate and difficult question of national unity in this country. I think that whatever the technical ruling Your Honour has made in relation to this intemperate, unfortunate statement by the Minister of Transport, it is very clear that when a senior minister of the Crown of Canada can stand up in the House of Commons and make that kind of allegation, designed in its way to create apprehensions about the Progressive Conservative party and also designed to undermine and to sow discord in the country and

[Mr. Lang.]

to create suspicions where no suspicions should exist, then, sir, I think we have a rather different circumstance.

I quite accept that the circumstance which has arisen now as a result of the unfortunate, irresponsible and childish remarks of the Minister of Transport is one which cannot be dealt with in any further procedural way by Your Honour. But we have in the House with us now—and I appreciate his staying at my request—the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the leader of the party of the minister who has made this allegation against the Progressive Conservative party as a whole in the country and who has made these statements which clearly can lead to a very serious hostility in the country.

The Prime Minister has heard these remarks stated. He was not here yesterday. I recall that in 1968 when the Prime Minister was campaigning in his first election as leader of his party he had the courage and the courtesy, when faced with an advertisement placed in the name of the then Liberal candidate in Calgary South which made similar unfounded allegations against the Progressive Conservative party, to dissociate himself as leader of his party from those irresponsible remarks, and I hope that the Prime Minister of Canada will use this opportunity here, not to hide himself behind the narrow grounds which have provided some protection under the rules to the Minister of Transport, but instead to accept his larger responsibility to national unity and stand in his place and dissociate himself from the statements which have been made by the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Procedurally we are in a very vague area here. On procedural grounds the matter was resolved. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has been given the floor. He has raised a point to which I think the House obviously would expect a reply. However, the matter was raised by the Minister of Transport last night in debate. In so far as the comment was not made about members of the House of Commons, it is a comment which can be made by the Minister of Transport.

Debate on the bill will carry on today. There will be a few hours of debate later on this afternoon, and if there are to be further replies, they can be made in that debate.

In so far as there was an unparliamentary use of language, that has been corrected procedurally. But there are ways of answering the allegations—or repeating them, in fact—if in fact they are parliamentary allegations; and in so far as they do not apply to members of this House, no procedural objections can arise.

I see that the Minister of Transport wants to answer the Leader of the Opposition. I think it is only fair that he make a response and then, from a procedural point of view, the matter ought to be closed.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I need not take a great amount of time to respond, but I think the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) did in fact impute motives to me in terms of trying to create some unfortunate and disastrous results in the country by my comments.