

Privilege

before we get on today to the matter of the setting up of a department of forestry.

The Minister of Justice said that he had told us in our House Leaders' meeting two weeks ago that this bill on forestry was to be the first item of business called. I want to remind the Minister of Justice and this House that well before that, on August 28, we gave formal notice in writing to you, Sir, that we intended to raise a question of privilege about the advertisements that the Department of Finance put in a number of Canadian newspapers on August 26, 1989.

The Minister of Justice talks about the well-known saying of the late Mr. Diefenbaker with reference to distraction by rabbit tracks. I say that when one looks at the flimsy and superficial argument offered by the Minister of Justice he is really giving rabbits and their tracks a bad name.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): The Minister of Justice, in a desperate attempt to find some hook on which to place its justification for the ads in question, says: "Let's take a look at the ads". He notes that in very small print in one spot the word "proposed" occurs. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take a look at the advertisement as a whole and the over-all impression conveyed and I think intended to be conveyed by the advertisement.

One of your distinguished predecessors, Mr. Speaker, has already been quoted here. Madam Speaker Sauvé in her ruling of October 17, 1980 said, and I want to quote this again:

The fact that certain members feel they are disadvantaged by not having the same funds to advertise as does the government, which could possibly be a point of debate, as a matter of impropriety or under any other heading, does not constitute a prima facie case of privilege unless such advertisements themselves constitute a contempt of the House, and to do so there would have to be some evidence that they represent a publication of false, perverted, partial or injurious reports of the proceedings of the House—

Madam Sauvé, a few weeks later, on October 29, 1980, giving a ruling on a related question said:

My role is to interpret the extracts of the document in question, not in terms of their substance, but to find whether on their face they represent such a distorted interpretation of the events or remarks of

our proceedings that they obviously attract the characterization of false.

It does no good for the Minister of Justice to desperately dredge out from the bowels of this ad, buried somewhere in it, the word "proposed". When one looks at the ad on its face one is drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that it is false in the sense referred to by Madam Speaker Sauvé.

• (1220)

Now we look at the ad itself. It covered two full pages in the newspapers and on one page we found only these words: "On January 1, 1991 Canada's federal sales tax system will change. Please Save This Notice." Then the ad on the same page goes on to say: "It explains the changes and the reasons for them".

It does not say it explains the proposed changes. It does not say we are giving you some ideas to help you come before the finance committee. It says in effect: "This is it. Do not bother expressing your opinion. This is the message. Do not bother expressing your opinion to the finance committee. Do not bother expressing your opinion to your members of parliament". Canada's federal sales tax system, the ad says, will change. It explains the changes and the reasons for them and says: "Please Save This Notice".

I do not think it helps the government in any way to have been able to find the word proposed, as I have said, buried in the bowels of this ad, this abomination of an ad. I do not think it helps the government at all to say that a parliamentary committee two years ago, or a year and a half ago—anyway before the last election—talked about the goods and services tax because there is nothing in this ad on its face or in its substance that says its purpose is to tell people about the parliamentary committee report.

I do not think it helps the Minister of Justice to say that the government presented a budgetary statement to this House which made some reference to a new sales tax. It does not help the government to say that this House, or rather the Conservative majority in it, adopted a motion approving the budget in general terms because the budget statement in question did not contain the information purported to be conveyed by the advertisements in question.

For all anybody could know from reading the budget statement, what was going to eventually come forward would have been a 1 per cent tax on caviare or a 2 per cent tax on stock exchange transactions. Because every time we asked the government what was going to be in