

Privilege—Mr. Reid

Ministers deliver their budget speeches, and any amendments that the minister may think fit thereafter, in a spirit of confidentiality. For example, budget speeches themselves are usually delivered in the evening to avoid any possible effect on the stock market. The tradition of secrecy ensures that all Canadians will be kept at the same advantage or disadvantage with respect to any budgetary matter, and that any announcement will be made first in this House and not privately to those who rightfully have no access and should have no access to that information. I suggest that budgetary secrecy is essential to guarantee to all taxpayers that no group can escape its share of taxation, and that in particular those whom they have elected to represent them in the House of Commons cannot escape laws approved for everybody.

I refer Your Honour to a statement of this principle and its consequence in Dawson's "The Government of Canada". He writes:

The necessary practice of keeping all budget provisions a close secret—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member but I do not think he need argue the sanctity of budget secrecy. That seems to me a matter that is generally agreed to by all members of the House; there is no disagreement there. The point raised by way of a question of privilege is that no budget secrecy was involved but, rather, in respect of legislation which took place after the budget. That may or may not be the case. I have been asked to reserve judgment until tomorrow. I wonder if the hon. member would direct himself to that point.

Mr. Stevens: The point is not only a question of budget secrecy but also the importance of keeping any tax change secret, and I would suggest that the two are one and the same.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: The parliamentary secretary has referred to what he regards as untrue allegations in the *Montreal Gazette*. I believe this goes much further than the statement made by the parliamentary secretary. Certainly, the testimony he put before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, and in an indirect way also put before the *Montreal Gazette* reporter, as reported, is an unfair reflection on members of this House. I refer to the report in the newspaper and I quote from it as follows:

We put on a lobby, and we knew about six weeks or so before it was announced that it (the tax) was coming off the boats but not the motors.

Later, the parliamentary secretary is reported to have said that inside information on confidential material is widespread, and "This happens all the time with members". As a final touch, he declared that he informed those concerned in his constituency of the budget details which concerned them.

I believe three aspects of this situation relate to the privileges of all hon. members and bear closer examination. First, the House cannot let go unchallenged the charge that all hon. members have access to information which they may not legally or constitutionally possess. This statement is untrue and defamatory and the parliamentary secretary should have the opportunity, before a committee, to explain or withdraw his statement.

[Mr. Stevens.]

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: Second, did the Minister of Finance in fact break his oath of secrecy and violate his constitutional obligation to maintain silence until budget night, and did this breach of secrecy then lead the parliamentary secretary to repeat and magnify the offence by reporting the information to those in his constituency who were in a position to profit directly? Third, does the Minister of Finance make a habit of revealing secret budget information to government backbenchers?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stevens: If so, to what extent is the budget confidential, and how is that confidentiality protected? Mr. Speaker, I will wait upon your instructions, but because of this background, at the appropriate moment I would like to move that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for further study; and if now is the appropriate time for my motion, I would be pleased to move it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, as Your Honour knows, I gave notice of my intention to move a motion under the provisions of Standing Order 26, but following what the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) had to say—and I listened with interest and care—I would inform Your Honour and the House that today I have no intention of moving that motion. I will reserve judgment. Depending on what is published in the *Montreal Gazette* tomorrow, I will decide whether that course of action will be required at that time.

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to say that I welcome what the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River had to say on this very important question. In substance, I agree completely with the procedural steps he has recommended to the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: The hon. member has categorically denied what I think are the essential points at issue in this matter, namely, on the one hand that he had any access to the details of the budget before it appeared, and on the other hand that he not only did not have that information but he did not convey it in any way to anyone. The hon. member has stated that he expects an unequivocal apology or withdrawal of the charges which were made in today's *Montreal Gazette*, in that newspaper tomorrow and upon failure to do that, if I understood the hon. member correctly, he intends to move that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. As I say, we agree with that as being the entirely honourable course of action under the circumstances.

● (1430)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: The only point I would add at this time is, depending on what is contained in the newspaper tomorrow, and depending on whether or not certain other matters remain unclarified before the House rises tomorrow,