

people who are in no position to defend themselves because they do not know that this very serious allegation has been made about them.

● (1520)

Therefore, I support the point of order which was made by our House leader, that the letter referred to by the Solicitor General, exclusive of the names of individuals and organizations, be tabled because it is important for the House to know just what was being said about certain civil servants. Moreover, it is important that those civil servants should know at an early point that serious allegations of this kind were brought against them. A colleague of mine suggested earlier today that they be told on a confidential basis so that these allegations—and they are no more than that at this point—be made known to them and that their names not be smeared as would be the case if names were made public.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the submissions which have been made by various members who have spoken, and as I listened to what has been said and the precedents which have been cited—although the precedents are well-founded—I think it is not just a case where we can say that a letter like this, containing allegations which we have only partially heard in accordance with the record, should be tabled. I think it would be an injustice if that letter were not tabled in full, because failure to do that, failure to table the text of the letter in full—with the appropriate names blanked out, as suggested—would leave the impression that whatever allegations are contained therein might be more serious than they really are and, indeed, taking it in reverse, that the reputations of those public servants would be even more damaged than by the failure and the half-truths—I do not suggest this in the sense of misleading—by the “half of the case” now on the public record. At least half of the case, and perhaps more, is now on the public record; who knows?

I think it would be a travesty, an injustice, if the precedents were not followed to put the full case on the record so that the appropriate judgments might be made. I would be greatly surprised if there were any hesitation at all on the part of a law officer of the Crown who has some responsibility in terms of civil rights—not complete responsibility from the point of view of the government but at least some responsibility—in refusing to table that letter. I would think he ought to acquiesce and volunteer the letter to the House.

Mr. Oberle: Further to this point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would add that it would seem to me that the paragraph which was offered to the House by the leader of the New Democratic Party would indeed coincide with the document which I have in my possession. It makes a farce of the statement the Solicitor General has made about the sensitivity of this document and the precautions which were taken to keep the document secret. I have a copy of it, and so has the leader of the NDP. I do not know how many more people have copies of this document.

Privilege—Mr. Oberle

An hon. Member: How many did you make?

Mr. Oberle: I did not give a copy of the letter that I have to the leader of the NDP, and I do not know where he got it from. To get back to the earlier point of order and the question of privilege I raised, I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take under further advisement the fact that I cannot see that the House should continue sitting here talking about anything else but this particular matter, in light of the fact that ministers opposite have consistently and categorically denied the existence of this thing and that they have deliberately misled this House.

An hon. Member: In other words, they lied.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member earlier argued his question of privilege. I indicated to him that a charge of misleading the House, if it is to form a question of privilege, must surely have a particularization to it which would enable the Chair to recognize the specific nature of the matter before determining whether or not it should be referred to a committee. The general allegation made by the hon. member certainly does not bring it within the confines of a question of privilege, and that matter has now been decided.

In respect of the point of order, I am prepared to hear the rest of what the hon. member has to say, as well as the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) who I think is also seeking to make a contribution to the discussion.

Mr. Oberle: Your Honour will recall that you interrupted me on several occasions when I tried to make my charge and my argument. I would at this point be prepared to read the letter in full, and I would then ask you to tell the House and the public of Canada whether these people, in their answers to our questions, not just yesterday and the day before, but on October 13, and in offices of high officials of this country, have deliberately misled and lied and denied this serious allegation.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member should realize that if he has an argument to make with respect to the allegations he made earlier, he ought to have made it earlier. This is not the time, in my opinion, for the hon. member to present further argument in support of what was a suggested question of privilege. I have made a ruling on that matter and it is now decided.

There is a point of order before the House. It is not for the Chair to take responsibility for what hon. members want to introduce into argument. If the hon. member wants to read that document, or any other, with respect to an argument on a point of order, that is his choice, not the choice of the Chair. I have no control over the substance of arguments put on a point of order.

There is a difficult point of order before the House. Arguments have been made, and I am prepared to listen to any relevant arguments from either side before coming to a conclusion. The point of order is somewhat narrow in scope. It has to do with the obligation of a minister to table a document which he has cited in argument in the House. That precedent has