

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton—Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter of precedent. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), as a former Minister of Finance, sought advice in the process of developing and framing a Budget. From the day the consultative process begins I suppose it can be assumed that anyone party to that process may be in a position to take advantage of the knowledge accumulated by virtue of the agreement or disagreement displayed on the subject matter discussed. There are indicators in the consultative process which those advising the Government could take advantage of.

However, I am very disappointed that this has been presented as a precedent. I am deeply disappointed that we should cast aspersions on any person who has been part of that process at any time unless we have unqualified proof. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition is a distinguished lawyer and is certainly familiar with the fact that proof is required. None has been offered, either in verbal or documentary form.

Neither do I think it proper to cast aspersions on the consultative process. That is part of the development of virtually every policy of Government, whether it be budgetary or anything else. Experts have been consulted, sometimes they are paid and sometimes they work for nothing, and I do not think we should cast aspersions, because we need them very badly. If criticism is deserved, and I do not believe it is, it should be levelled purely and simply at the Minister, and not on those employed to advise. The possibility of a breach of confidence has always existed. If we prove breach of confidence at a later date, and it apparently cannot be proven now, then it becomes a very serious matter.

• (1650)

There have been historic examples of opportunity. Did they call their office today? I think that is an irrelevant question because they are under oath. There is no reason why they should not call their offices although there is a major reason why they should not discuss the subject matter on which they were sought as advisers. That would be a gross breach of confidentiality and should be punished as such. However, it has not been suggested that there is proof that such a thing happened. There has been no suggestion that they broke their oath. There has only been an assumption that they could break it. That assumption could have been made for years with regard to the consultative budgetary process.

Was it withheld from Members of Parliament? That has been the subject of discussion in this House for many years but it has never been placed in the rules of the House as an obligation of any Minister of the Crown. If there were a rule of this House which stated that Ministers of the Crown are obligated to make their statements within the House first, there would be a breach of privilege. However, there is no such rule of the House. Therefore, there has been no breach of any rule or any practice of the House with regard to traditional behaviour of cabinet Ministers, including Finance Ministers.

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

While we may possibly wish to adopt a rule, there is no such rule of this House which has been breached.

The only difference between this and other questions which have arisen in the House, as mentioned by the Hon. Member for Brampton—Georgetown (Mr. McDermid), is that these people who are under oath, not the newspapers, have been given a copy of the work to which they have made a contribution. If it can be proven that they have taken any advantage of the information or have disseminated it in any way, I believe they are subject to criminal prosecution.

The question is not whether there is precedent for what has happened, because there is indeed precedent. The question is whether the House is of a mind to adopt rules which would deny Ministers outside advice because we question the confidentiality. Are we treating outsiders as we treat Members of the House? We have breached confidentiality in this House. I have not, but others have. I say unequivocally that I have not, but other Members of this House have breached *in camera* confidentialities. They have gone to the press with them and that has been discussed in this House.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Name them.

Mr. McCain: If we want to assume that everyone outside of this House will breach confidentiality, as has been charged, I suppose it is just that we raise this as a question of privilege. However, I am very concerned about the aspersions which have been cast and the innuendoes which have been made. It is not in the best interests of good government or the consultative process to question the ability of advisers to keep a secret.

Mr. Speaker: I may be able to help the Hon. Member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet) whom I am going to hear. It is the clear understanding of the Chair that, whether or not these 20 have some advantage, there is no suggestion being made by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis), or any of his colleagues, that these 20 people have broken their oath or done anything illegal or contrary to the position of trust which they are in. There is a suggestion that because of what they know they will have some advantage. However, that does not go to the question of moral turpitude.

As I understand the position of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and members of the New Democratic Party, they are not making an accusation against the honour or integrity of these people. They have made the suggestion, for me and others to consider, that apart from integrity they may well have some advantage in the commercial world in which they move as a consequence of what they have learned.

There is no doubt in the mind of the Chair that that is the position of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and others. I see them nodding. I want Hon. Members to disabuse themselves of any concern that the Chair is in any way moved by any suggestion, innocent or otherwise, that there is any wrongdoing or lack of moral propriety and honour on the part