

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 26, 1975

The House met at 2 p.m.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### HOUSE OF COMMONS

#### TABLING OF FIFTH REPORT OF THE CLERK OF PETITIONS

**Mr. Speaker:** I have the pleasure to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has laid on the table the fifth report of the Clerk of Petitions.

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### PRIVILEGE

#### MR. FORRESTALL—ALLEGED WARNING OF NATIONAL HARBOURS BOARD AGAINST COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

**Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East):** Mr. Speaker, I will try not to take up too much of the time of the House. In the ten years that I have been in the House, this is the first time that I have intruded upon the goodwill of the House and Mr. Speaker's patience with respect to what may be a grievance but in fact appears to be a very clear question of privilege. I rise on a matter of privilege concerning the position taken by the National Harbours Board which affects my rights as a member of this House and which, indeed, strikes at the most basic historical and traditional privilege of this House, namely, that of being a representative institution.

The incident arises from an attempt, or rather a series of attempts, over the past year on the part of the National Harbours Board to impose on the port of Halifax and Dartmouth a system of shed rentals. This policy has been universally condemned by each and every segment of the port communities, including the mayors, members of parliament and members of the Shipping Federation of Canada.

As a final effort to see if the deadlock could be broken, the Shipping Federation of Canada requested a meeting with the National Harbours Board. The board accepted, but insisted that this meeting take place in Montreal, and the federation agreed. Its members travelled there on Monday, February 24. The meeting was not chaired by the chairman of the National Harbours Board but by the vice-chairman, and representative on the board of the St. Lawrence river ports, Mr. Guy Beaudet, acting as the official spokesman of the National Harbours Board.

After what has been described as a stormy meeting, aggravated by the fact that the St. Lawrence board

member was in the position of ultimate authority over the Atlantic port system, as reported in the *Halifax Mail Star* of Tuesday, February 25, a warning was issued to those in attendance.

The gist of what I have to say follows. On the front page lead story in the *Halifax Mail Star* referred to, the following paragraph appeared:

Halifax representatives of the Shipping Federation of Canada were "warned" by the vice-chairman of the National Harbours Board that they were not to release details of the policy (already in circulation) to the public or members of parliament.

Since there appear on the order paper of this House several unanswered and, incidentally, starred questions on this matter in my name, I can only conclude that this threat of dire consequences was directed at me and at my fellow representatives of the Halifax and Dartmouth port community, the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) and the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave). Inasmuch as ministers of the Crown are also members of parliament, I think that this exclusion would have applied to them as well. Mr. Speaker, I have since verified that these comments were in fact uttered, although no recording of the meeting was kept.

I submit that it is incredible that an agency of the federal Crown with the authority and absolute power of the National Harbours Board should make such a statement, attempting to enjoin responsible citizens from communicating with members of parliament and with ministers of the Crown. I would suggest that this threat, this intimidation, this senseless coercion, affects my privilege and affects materially the privilege of the House. If this institution is to keep its cherished representative value, then I would submit it is a logical and physical prerequisite that representations must always be able to be made freely and without impediment to members of this chamber.

● (1410)

When that ability is strangled, the ability of this House to continue to represent is dead. Our trust is to preserve that ability, a trust which weighs most heavily on the first comonomer. Every member of this chamber has taken an oath. There is no reason why members of the Shipping Federation of Canada cannot communicate with a member of parliament. The oath of a member of the National Harbours Board is no more sacred than that taken by hon. members of this House. Our interests are common, in fact.

I refer Your Honour to your own comments the other day in speaking to questions of privilege somewhat similar—although different in some aspects—raised by the hon. member for Montreal-Bourassa (Mr. Trudel) and the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson). With respect to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Montreal-Bourassa Your Honour said, and I quote: