

Second, I would now wish to reserve a second question of privilege until I have had an opportunity to verify the blues about what the hon. member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm) actually said this afternoon. The way I understood it, Madam Speaker, he has now modified his statement to say that the minister supplied him with a false document, whereas in his previous question of privilege he spoke about the department deliberately misleading him. Therefore, I want to verify the blues on this matter and reserve my question of privilege until tomorrow afternoon.

MR. GURBIN—DISTRIBUTION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION
TO DEFEATED LIBERAL CANDIDATE

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey): Madam Speaker, the basis for my question of privilege concerns a press release put out by the Liberal party in my constituency on behalf of a defeated Liberal candidate. I would like to table this press release, if I may, and I will leave it with the Clerk of the House.

The issue at large in this press release concerns a place called Dyer's Bay. The following is from the press release:

Tenders will be called next week for the reconstruction of the dock at Dyer's Bay—

Government information was given only to a defeated local candidate and his local party organization. It has still not been communicated to me as a sitting member of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Gurbin: I have followed this particular issue through two governments. I have been talking to the small crafts and harbours branch of the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans, and I was eagerly awaiting this information.

I believe that this breach of etiquette has affected the fundamental basis of parliamentary democracy. It has threatened my rights and responsibilities as a member of Parliament. I think it represents one party's influence that is spreading by using the financial resources of a government that has responsibilities to an entire country. A minister of the Crown has used his position to selectively distribute information to further the career of a defeated Liberal candidate.

Traditional Canadian patronage and Liberal appointments, as across Canada, are also seen in my constituency of Bruce-Grey. If you add to this the habit as represented in my point of privilege, you have a political tool to ensure that this country will be manipulated by one political party. This practice reflects on the ethics of those ministers, defeated Liberal candidates and local Liberal organizations that use this practice.

As the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) recently learned, members on this side of the House demand the respect that Parliament confers on members by virtue of having been elected. For the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to expand partisan preferential treatment by giving government information first and only to a defeated candidate is an even more, if possible, serious breach of parliamentary ethics. It must stop.

Privilege—Mr. Cossitt

My constituency of Bruce-Grey has given me the honour of representing it in this House of Commons. The democratic process will freshen itself at another election at the call of Parliament. The attempt to manipulate this constituency shows both a lack of respect for the people I represent and a lack of respect for the democratic process. The constitutional difficulties we are experiencing now are not so much a problem with what is written, but the result of the ambitions of those who hold their own interests above the interests of our land.

This point of privilege has serious implications for the future of this Parliament. I ask you, Madam Speaker, to bring forward a judgment that will reflect the tradition and the spirit of parliamentary democracy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I rise to ask that you permit the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc) to reply to this question of privilege tomorrow, and that it be held over.

Second, with respect to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Peterborough, (Mr. Domm) and the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), since they fall under a similar heading of rights of members of Parliament, I would ask you to defer your judgment until you have heard the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans on this particular question of privilege.

Madam Speaker: Order, please, I will just answer the parliamentary secretary. I will take this question of privilege under advisement. Indeed, there are some affinities with the other two questions of privilege that have been raised previously in the House. I am not saying certainly that there are affinities, but at least on the surface there seem to be some affinities. I do not know whether I will rule on all three of them on the same day, but I will delay the ruling on this particular one and I will look at the other two to see when I can rule on them.

MR. COSSITT—ABSENCE OF REPLY FROM PRIME MINISTER
DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville): Madam Speaker, I have a very short question of privilege arising out of a question that I directed to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). I realize under the rules of the House that no minister, including the Prime Minister, is obliged to answer a question. Ministers can, as the Prime Minister did, decline to answer a question and remain seated.

I would like to make this point as my question of privilege, that when the government refuses to furnish information to a member of Parliament or to Parliament in general, and when a Prime Minister arrogantly, superciliously and pompously remains seated on his rump, then it is high time we changed the rules in this House so that ministers and the Prime Minister do have to give an answer when information is requested. We have seen case after case of information being