

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

stand it, your duty with respect to the question of privilege which I moved is to see whether there is a prima facie case of privilege; it will be up to the House to decide whether it goes to a committee or otherwise. That is the duty.

● (1750)

I think it is the duty of a Member of Parliament, notwithstanding what the President of the Treasury Board says, when there is a possibility that the privileges of members have been breached, to raise the matter if he feels he should. I feel that I should, Madam Speaker. I do not accept for one moment the appellation placed upon me by the President of the Treasury Board in a transparent defence of an obvious breach of the rights of Members of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (York-Peel): Madam Speaker, in supporting the question of privilege raised by my colleague, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), I should like to mention a few things that have gone unstated so far. Frankly, I find it amazing that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) faced with this serious infraction, should turn and accuse Members of Parliament for sharing what is already public information. How can that minister more effectively show the contempt in which he holds Members of Parliament. To say that we cannot share the same information—

Mr. Blais: It was not published.

Mr. Stevens: —that the press gallery is sharing at the present time—

Mr. Blais: Prove that it was published.

Mr. Stevens: It was published.

An hon. Member: Prove it.

Mr. Stevens: The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) has asked how we can prove that it was published. If this matter is referred to the appropriate committee I will be able to tell that committee that if any member of this House had gone to the proper print machine at Canadian Press they would have seen what I now have in my hand as copy coming off the Canadian Press machine. I personally took ten pages of the information that was put out over the Canadian Press wire and had it copied on our own facilities in the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Stevens: The fact is that this is information any member attending the press gallery could openly get. For the President of the Privy Council and the President of the Treasury Board in their desperation to say now that perhaps it was not published, is absolutely ludicrous.

Not only was this information published but it was published with this lead: "Advance—for release by wire, possibly about 3.45 p.m. EST."

Mr. Pinard: Read the last line.

Mr. Evans: Read it all.

Mr. Stevens: Madam Speaker, I would point out to you that the Toronto Stock Exchange did not close until four o'clock, so this was actually out on the wire at least 15 minutes ahead of the closing of the Toronto Stock Exchange. It reads in part:

OTTAWA (CP)—Highlights of the spending estimates for the 1981-82 fiscal year tabled in the Commons Wednesday: Total government outlays will increase 13 per cent to \$67.6 billion—a spending rate of about \$129,000 a minute . . . Interest charges on the national debt—\$137 billion as of April 1—will cost the average taxpayer \$795 in the fiscal year.

It goes on to say:

The public service will climb by 1 per cent to 315,680 persons.

Mr. Pinard: You are announcing it.

Mr. Stevens: Here is where it gets very interesting. It goes on to say:

The annual spending predictions tabled in the Commons by Treasury Board President Donald Johnston are up from \$59.9 billion a year ago and work out to about \$129,000 a minute.

I want to emphasize that this is a wire that has gone out from coast to coast saying that the minister has already tabled the estimates for 1981-82 in this House.

Mr. Pinard: It was not published.

Mr. Stevens: The press release goes on to say:

The hefty blue book of spending plans—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I just informed the House that it was important for hon. members speaking on a question of privilege to discuss the privilege. I do not think I need have the hon. member read the full press communiqué to the House. In the interest of saving the time of the House I would ask him to discuss the privilege, and not necessarily quote so extensively from the press communiqué, unless he feels it is very pertinent to his question of privilege.

Mr. Stevens: Madam Speaker—

Mr. Blais: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I can't hear.

[Translation]

Hon. J. J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, on a point of order. You have indicated that the hon. member should confine his remarks to the matter under discussion.

Quite simply in order to reinforce your decision, I would like to indicate to the hon. member that with regard to the documents he is now reading to you, he has failed to give you