

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Deniger (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has defined quite well the context within which you must soon make a decision. Yes or no, in view of the evidence given by hon. members opposite, is there a *prima facie* case of privilege? Madam Speaker, after listening with a lot of attention—which is very difficult I pray you to believe—to all the arguments of the opposition members, I must respectfully conclude that there is not.

First of all, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), who introduced the motion and who is no longer in the House, raised two points. He implied, and so did other members opposite, that the advertising campaign purchased and broadcast by the Canadian government was simply a propaganda instrument for the Liberal party. Madam Speaker, I have never in all my life heard so many inaccuracies and lies spoken by one party. In view of the climate which accompanied the referendum campaign, when all members of this House gave their support to what the Canadian government had done and congratulated the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) for the commitment that he made a few days before the referendum, that is, to renew the constitution, how can we have strayed so far from this spirit which sustained the House and all its members during the referendum? This is my first point, Madam Speaker.

As for the principle itself, Madam Speaker, only one precedent has been mentioned. Unfortunately, I am not aware of the situation which occurred in 1964 between the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and the then minister of national health and welfare, but as for the hon. member for St. John's East, he referred to the ruling made by your predecessor about the task forces established by the then minister of transport, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski).

Madam Speaker, when you look at this ruling and especially at the discussions that came before it, you will note that I had myself taken part in the debate and expressed the opinion that there was indeed a question of privilege in that case because my rights as a parliamentarian had been infringed upon. So what distinguishes in this case what you have to decide from what your predecessor decided is precisely this: the task forces set up by the government of the time were made up of only one member, a government member, of course, who held a mandate and was paid out of public funds to go and investigate all over the place and report. I believe, Madam Speaker, that this has precisely nothing to do with the case we are dealing with because we all agree in the House that the constitution should be amended. So, Madam Speaker, if we agree on the principle, what is wrong with our advertising campaign? Because that is exactly what it says.

Madam Speaker, there is not a single member in this House who can say his constituents are fully aware of all federal

programs in his riding. If one thing shocks me and aggrieves me as a member, it is when I go back in my riding and say, "Do you know that we, the federal government, are involved in that school, that road, and nobody knows about it?" That must change, Madam Speaker. And that is indeed the scope of the advertising campaign of the federal government under the auspices of the Minister of State responsible for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), to indicate to Canadians what the federal government is doing for them, to indicate to the Government of Canada the policies we want Canadians to understand and in which we want them to participate. And if, Madam Speaker, members across are now telling us they did not accept the principle of constitutional renewal, unfortunately I must say we are very far from the spirit of May 22.

[English]

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary a few moments ago, and I had a little difficulty containing myself. I do not think there is any doubt in this House of Commons that members of this House in all parties are prepared to accept the proposition, and have accepted the proposition, of constitutional renewal. In other words, what I am saying to my friend is that there are no second-class members. There is no member who is better for his country because he has one point of view, or a detriment to his country because he has another point of view.

The essence of what we have talked about, the charter of rights and everything else, is that I have the right to have a view. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has the right to have a view, so does the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), and so do you, Madam Speaker, and I am offended by what the parliamentary secretary said. I am also offended that he should be allowed to go, the way he was allowed to go, outside your suggestion to hon. members.

Some hon. Members: Come on!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I listen to rhetoric and I sometimes engage in it, but I listen to it, and I have the right to be offended as well by what I have heard.

The issue is a simple one. It is absolutely simple, and it was put simply and clearly by the most experienced member of this House. It is whether or not it is appropriate for the government to spend public funds to promote a decision by Parliament. I think the government can spend public funds for advertising. I have never argued that it could not. All governments have done that.

The issue here is the question of timing, and it is particularly acute because this is a very important issue. We are not just talking about the Canada Pension Plan, capital punishment, gun control or abortion. What we are talking about is the foundation stone of our country, and if there is any question at all in a document—secret, leaked or otherwise—that it might be inappropriate, then it is absolutely inappropriate for the minister not to have considered it, and if he did not consider it—and he may have; I do not know—he ought to be on his feet, not arguing—and he is not arguing; I note that he is