

The purpose of first reading is to allow any bill to be introduced, printed and distributed so as to give Members an opportunity to study it.

Today, the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) held a press briefing on a Bill which I understand he intends to introduce in the House of Commons later this afternoon. At that press briefing the Solicitor General provided the press with printed copies of the Bill that he intends to introduce, together with explanations as to the Minister's and the Ministry's intentions with regard to the Bill.

I submit to you, Sir—and I want to make reference to certain arguments that were made before Speaker Jerome in 1978—that the Minister has breached the privileges of the Members of the House by providing to the press copies of a Bill in its entirety together with explanatory material in advance of that information having been made available to Members of the House of Commons through the proper channels.

I cannot read into what the Minister's intentions were, and his intentions may be laudable. However, it is quite clear that a public Bill must be approved by the House of Commons for printing and given first reading before it is made available to any other individuals and that the responsibility of Members of Parliament of the House to be able to deal adequately with a piece of legislation was grossly infringed upon. Others were given both the Bill itself and all of the explanatory material pertaining thereto in advance of Members and, therefore, Members are unable either to deal with the legislation adequately or, for that matter, to respond properly to questions from their constituents which may confront them.

● (1510)

You may know, Sir, that on November 27, 1978 as reported in *Hansard* at page 1519, a similar matter was raised before Mr. Speaker Jerome. At that time Mr. Speaker Jerome referred to the practice which was growing in the parliamentary procedures of having lock-ups and the resulting problems of having such lock-ups inasmuch as certain Members of the House were given privileged information in advance of other Members.

The Minister may want to claim that the information he has given out cannot be released in advance of the Bill being given first reading because he has required of the press that they remain within the confines of the room in which the briefing was given. I submit that the Minister has no right to presuppose that first reading will, in fact, be granted. The Minister has no right to presuppose that the Bill, upon his request for introduction, will automatically be given that introduction and will be permitted to be printed and to be proceeded with.

It is quite clear in Beaufort that the practice of not granting first reading is a practice which is, if not common, certainly available to Members of the House of Commons under certain circumstances, this being one of them.

Therefore, what the Minister has done is made available to some individuals, not Members of Parliament, legislation that is not available to Members of Parliament. He has done so in such a way as to do two things. He is either going to keep

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those people locked up until the Bill receives first reading, which I submit could take weeks, or he is intent upon releasing the information in advance.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am going to direct the constables to clear the galleries. There appear to be conversations going on that should not be taking place in the galleries.

Mr. Deans: I thought you were referring to me at first, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member understands exactly what I am referring to. I am asking the constables to clear the galleries, please.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: It should be noted it is the Liberal galleries.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) has the floor.

Mr. Deans: I was not questioning what you said, Mr. Speaker. At the moment I did not hear you quite clearly and I was not sure what I had done wrong.

What I was saying in essence was that the Minister has breached my privileges as a Member. Not only did the Minister agree to provide this Bill to members of the press; not only did the Minister set up a press briefing for the purpose of giving this information to members of the press in advance of giving it out to Members of the House of Commons, but his staff refused access to the room in which the briefing was taking place to a Member of Parliament who sought access.

Some Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Deans: I suggest that goes even further in establishing my claim that there is, in fact, a prima facie case of privilege.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to review, if you would, the comments of Mr. Speaker Jerome in which he made reference to the practice which had grown up in which he said—I am paraphrasing it, and I will leave it for you, Sir, to read or to have read for you—that the practice which had grown up did violate practices of the House of Commons, which prior to that time had been acceptable, that the holding of briefings of this sort should be done only under careful scrutiny and with agreement from the Parties within the House of Commons and should not extend simply to the wishes of one individual Minister to gain for himself some additional press coverage at the expense of the rights of Members.

I ask you in considering this matter, Mr. Speaker, to consider whether it is not time we stopped this practice and whether it is not time that we required the proper procedures of the House to be followed, in other words, that the first time a Bill is made available for scrutiny is when it is introduced in the House of Commons for first reading—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!