

ston, Susan Natrass, John Primrose, Ken Bate, Gaétan Boucher, Sylvia Burka, Cathy Priestner, Nancy Garapick, Anne Jardin, Cindy Nicholas, Sylvie Fortier, Carol Stuart, Laura Wilkin and Patricia Messner.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1500)

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I will try to make my point of order without in any way attempting to deprecate the hardworking parliamentary assistants to the ministers, and especially the abilities of the lady member in question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lawrence: However, when a member in this House asks a question that can only be within the knowledge of a member of the ministry, directly relating to a cabinet affair only, and the member who is asking the question makes that apparent at the very beginning, surely it makes a sham and a façade of the question period if we cannot receive an answer from a responsible minister of the Crown. In attempting to do so, Mr. Speaker, you, in your discretion, cut us off without giving permission to ask a supplementary question, which would have made that readily apparent.

Certainly, a parliamentary assistant does not, or ought not—if they do, they are in breach of the oath of secrecy—to have information that can be available only in relation to a cabinet decision or what led up to a cabinet decision.

My point of order is this. When a member asking a question makes it quite apparent that it has to be answered by a member of the ministry, and I am not talking about a routine question that perhaps a parliamentary assistant can answer, then surely the privilege of the member of the ministry is to either give an answer or say nothing. However, we should not be sloughed off by a parliamentary assistant.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The position of the Chair is quite clear on this subject. This is not the first time it has been raised. As far as the Chair is concerned, perhaps not as far as other members are concerned, one of the early and more memorable decisions, personally, was to refuse to permit parliamentary secretaries the opportunity to put questions in the question period. I have taken that decision because I hold that parliamentary secretaries who ought to be, or seek to be clothed with the responsibility of answering questions on behalf of their ministers, ought not to be able to have it both ways, both to ask and to answer questions. If I refuse them the right to ask questions because they have the obligation or the right to answer them, surely I am being consistent, and I would not now be able to say that a parliamentary secretary ought not to have the capacity to answer questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presence in Gallery

[Translation]

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege, as I gave you notice of it in writing yesterday. It arises from the publication in the *Globe and Mail* of May 19, 1976 of a report of the meeting of the House Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates held on the morning of May 18. I had to postpone this matter until today, Mr. Speaker, because I had difficulty obtaining the report.

In my opinion, the matter I am raising closely affects the privileges of all members of the House. I would like to quote a first excerpt from the article emanating from the Canadian Press and published in the *Globe and Mail* to put the question in its proper perspective. The Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates was considering Bill C-81, an Act to amend the Senate and House of Commons Act and the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act with respect to the escalation of certain payments thereunder. The main witness was the President of the Treasury Board, the hon. Jean Chrétien. The article in question is entitled:

[English]

NDP scores cheap political points
Despite grumbles, MPs back pay freeze plan

Je cite:

Mr. Chrétien said the public has little idea of the amount of work an MP must do. Many work from early morning until after the Commons closes at 10.30 p.m. he said.

The Commons sits from 2 p.m., three days a week. There are rarely more than a handful of MPs in the House during evening sittings.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, this last paragraph is the basis for a prima facie case of privilege and concerns this institution as a whole.

[Translation]

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Canadian Press reporter who wrote this article deliberately and maliciously tried to deceive the Canadian public by clearly giving the impression, first that the House of Commons sits only three days a week and, second, that only a handful of hon. members take part in the numerous activities of this institution. This kind of article from a press agency deemed to be responsible is an attack on our institution. The article is an attack on the intelligence of Canadians who ask for and require objective and complete information.

I could speak several minutes on the many activities of this House, of the committees, on constituency and party work, etc. In fact, all hon. members are familiar with these facts. This makes the kind of journalism mentioned above all the more odious and offensive. The lack of objectivity showed by some members of the press gallery—not by all, I must admit—is so obvious and I think that the few reporters who maliciously cast a slur on the integrity of the House of Commons and on hon. members' participation in the business of this institution should be required to explain themselves before the Committee on Privileges and Elections. One more minute, Mr. Speaker, to raise an aspect of the question which concerns me personally. In the same article of the *Globe and Mail*, one can read:

[English]

Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria) said he would support the bill—