

Question of Privilege

I want to emphasize what was said by my leader, the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam. It seems to me the course which the Minister of Transport should follow is clear. I would be happy to accept his reservation that the government should make public only those sections of the report which he feels would help clear up the situation. If he wishes to make the kind of reservation he has indicated I would be happy to accept it.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Winnipeg South Centre): I should like to ask the Minister of Transport a question before making certain observations. Would he verify the amount mentioned by Mr. McGregor as reported in the newspaper article? Is that the extra cost which would be involved in maintaining the base in Winnipeg?

Mr. McIlraith: That question is improper.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McIlraith: The hon. member is seeking to make me disclose to him the contents of the report, and I have consistently refrained from doing this for the reasons I have explained. The hon. gentleman will be able to satisfy his curiosity about the answer to that question when the summary of the report is tabled. I cannot answer his question now.

Mr. Churchill: Are we, then, to accept the statement of Mr. McGregor that this will be the extra cost if the base is maintained there, or are we to reject that statement. This is what has now complicated the issue. I am not going to accuse Mr. McGregor of not telling the truth, but if this is an inflated figure we should know about it immediately. If this is a figure which is going to influence the government in making a decision, and if it is a wrong figure, what position are we left in?

It seems to me the government must now take some action. The minister has told us repeatedly that he is relying on this report in order to reach a decision as to what should be done about the base in Winnipeg. The other members from Winnipeg have not been given a chance even to peek at the report. I have not even seen the volume, but apparently the report has now been partially disclosed by the president of T.C.A. If the government intends to make a decision based on the figure disclosed by him it seems to me we should know whether that figure is accurate or not. There is no question but that the government should now take immediate steps to clear up this issue.

The government of Manitoba has made a request to examine the report so they could put their case forward. In fact the Prime Minister has asked the government of Manitoba to present its case again. It did so in

[Mr. Knowles.]

June of this year and received what was understood to be an assurance by all those present, that the other factors would be taken into account in addition to any report made as a result of the Dixon-Speas economic survey. It is a very peculiar situation now in so far as the base in Winnipeg is concerned, when we learn that the medium jets are not going to be serviced there and that the Viscounts are going to be withdrawn. The assurance, therefore, was just a sop to attempt to bemuse the people of Winnipeg and the government of Manitoba.

This motion, Mr. Speaker, is certainly extraordinarily mild, stating only that the government should give immediate consideration to the question of making the report public. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has pointed out, he has tried to be very kind to the government, which is not an unusual position for him to take.

Mr. Knowles: Order.

Mr. Churchill: He has so worded the motion that the government can easily get off the hook. However, the situation has now reached the stage where the government must take some steps in order to clear up this situation. Is Mr. McGregor giving the right figure with regard to the base in Winnipeg or is he confusing the issue? Only the minister has seen the report and read it, and only he can clear this up.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): We listened to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre as he set out his reasons for raising a question of privilege. He made out a very good case, and one that deserves the support of the house. I feel that this question of privilege is one that is indicative of the need for action to be taken by parliament to secure information from this government which has shown a propensity for concealment or for selective information.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I repeat, it has shown a propensity for selective information. However, after having made a strong statement the hon. member now puts a motion which, if it had been drawn in co-operation with the Secretary of State, could not have been weaker. I cannot understand this. It merely says that in the opinion of this house the government should give immediate consideration to the question of making public the contents of the report. I am impressed with the fact that there is a breach of the privileges and rights of parliament. I am also impressed by the wonderfully co-operative spirit in the motion which, as the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre said a minute ago, is not unusual.