

trigger witch-hunts any time someone figures that he wants to put in question the honour, dignity and the reputation of a very honourable minister.

If someone wants to pursue this in committee, then I think he must put up or shut up. We are speaking about reputations and that is a serious thing. If we look to the traditions of this House, we find that there is only one precedent to guide us in this situation and that is the Porter case in 1924 which held that if a member makes a charge and the charge is not substantiated, then he resigns his seat and suffers the consequences.

An hon. Member: Nonsense!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville): Madam Speaker, it is my intention to make a very brief contribution to this matter.

An hon. Member: Make a charge.

Mr. Cossitt: Hon. members opposite seem to have a habit of mumbling, which is not unusual because they are jumpy over what is happening.

I do not intend to go into quotations from various rules which I think support the stand we have taken. Things have been adequately presented by my colleague who spoke a few moments ago. I simply intend to bring forward a very basic point and that is, if a member of this House finds that budget information has been heard outside this House or, rather, is in the possession of people outside this House before this House has it, that is a breach of my privileges, the privileges of everyone in this House.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) pointed out that it is really irrelevant whether the information has been printed, as the minister said; what is relevant is who had possession of it. That is a very serious matter. It becomes more and more obvious all the time that this information was in the hands of persons other than the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) and his officials who would be sworn to the usual and expected secrecy. It appears more and more obvious that a very distinct breach of privilege has occurred as the result of what happened.

We have heard two ministers speak today. The minister responsible for housing completely contradicted what he said yesterday. He made one set of statements yesterday and today he said that is not the way it really happened and that it happened in another way. The minister who is chairman of the—

Madam Speaker: Order, order. I just want to remind the hon. member that if he wants to enlighten the Chair on his question of privilege, he would have to deal with the question of privilege and not argue the case. The case can be argued at length once the Chair has found that there is a prima facie case of privilege. At this particular point, however, members have to concentrate on indicating to me where the privilege of a member has been breached. The member was arguing the

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case, and I know he will want to do that later if I find there is a prima facie case, but not at this point.

Mr. Cossitt: Madam Speaker, it is not my intention to argue the case. It is my intention simply to state that it is obvious that others, outside this House and other than the Minister of Finance and those surrounding him, had private information on the budget to which they were not entitled and therefore it is a breach of privilege for every member of this House. It must be dealt with in that way as a most serious matter.

I would suggest, with all due respect to the Chair, that if the government and members on all sides of this House are willing to put up or shut up, as someone said, they would be glad to refer this to a committee and have it examined there.

As was pointed out by my colleague from Newfoundland, if it is found that there is no breach of privilege, then the ministers will be very happy. If it is found that there is a case of privilege, then the ministers will be dealt with. Let the chips fall where they may. I think we have every right to expect our privileges to be upheld and that this matter will be thoroughly investigated from top to bottom as soon as possible.

● (1520)

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, this is a matter which is extremely serious, and to find an appropriate way to deal with it is very difficult, as I can appreciate. However, there is a series of conflicting statements which cause at least this hon. member to have serious doubts about what we have before us at the moment. I am concerned that, in fact, if one were to look at all the statements which have been made by the minister since yesterday regarding the matter raised initially by the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) and subsequently by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), one could come to the conclusion that there were areas of conflict.

As I understand, the minister has indicated that the information he obtained by virtue of a briefing given to him and to other members of the cabinet by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) was not relayed by him to anyone until after the Minister of Finance rose in the House at eight o'clock. However, there is a statement attributed to the minister responsible for housing which would indicate that his officials began to prepare the ad at five o'clock and that they worked from five o'clock through the night preparing the advertisement.

I would ask Your Honour to consider whether it is a breach of privilege for a minister to advise anyone at all, even his staff who are not sworn to an oath of secrecy, concerning information contained in the budget which has not yet been put before the House of Commons and which could conceivably be of value to private citizens were they apprised of that information in advance of the budget being handed down.

It may well be that Your Honour will find that there is no privilege based on the fact that there is nothing in *Erskine May*, in *Beauchesne* or in the rules of the House of Commons to indicate that there is a need or a requirement for budget secrecy. However, the tradition and the convention has always