

Privilege—Mr. Nickerson

Referring to the topics to be discussed, the material reads:

These three topics for discussion were chosen by the Liberal Party of the N.W.T.—

I might point out that the meeting was chaired by the local Liberal president. That evening there was a \$40 a plate dinner held for party fund raising purposes, attended by the minister. You paid \$40 if you wanted to see the hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

● (1510)

I submit, Madam Speaker, that there are three areas of privilege involved here. First of all, there is the question of misleading the House in the minister's reply. He said that all people would be consulted, whereas in fact it turns out that only those people who were willing to attend a Liberal party gathering were the people who were consulted. I submit the minister is using his ministerial authority for partisan purposes. I know this is always a matter of degree, but I submit that in this case he has overstepped the line.

He has in a way insulted the public service, particularly those members employed within the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. He has in fact shown that he has little or no confidence in the people who work for that department. He does not trust them to be part of the consultative processes, but would prefer to leave that to the party organization. Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, the chagrin of departmental officials who are pressured into paying \$40 to the Liberal coffers in order to hear what their minister has to say to them?

I submit that in doing these things the minister in a way has impaired my ability to do my job as a member of Parliament representing my particular constituency of Western Arctic.

I submit that I was to a certain extent misled in the House, and that neither I nor my constituents could take part in these consultations unless we were prepared to attend a Liberal party function. To many people in the west and north that is something, of course, which they would avoid at any cost.

I submit the possibility exists that public servants, those people employed within the department, were under some undue pressure to attend these partisan functions, and it is difficult for me to get independent advice from members of the public service.

That is really what I wanted to say, Madam Speaker. May I conclude by saying I do not want to see Hamilton-style politics pollute the north. I think they have enough of that in Hamilton. So far the political process in northern Canada has been rather unsullied and we do not want the extension of Hamilton-style politics into the north. We do not want to have to belong to a certain party before getting a job in the public service or being awarded a contract. We in the Northwest Territories or the Yukon do not want association with the alleged, rather unsavoury elements of society that I am led to believe is the case in Hamilton.

Madam Speaker: In spite of the fact that the hon. minister is not present in the House, I think I can rule on this particular

question of privilege. I may remind hon. members that it is not necessary that ministers be in the House in this regard. I would have agreed to defer this question but the hon. member chose to raise it anyway, and I commend him for that because, indeed, questions of privilege cannot be delayed indefinitely, and if privilege exists it may be so important that the House cannot function before it is settled. However, I feel I can make a ruling at this time, and I am glad the hon. member chose to raise the matter today.

I must inform the hon. member that the minister in question may choose to consult whomever he wishes in the process of carrying out his departmental responsibilities. If he did tell the hon. member he would consult, I do not think he gave details as to whom he would consult, and the hon. member did not elaborate on that. At any rate, the minister is free to consult in the manner in which he himself sees fit. I certainly have no jurisdiction in respect of how a minister of the Crown discharges his departmental responsibilities in that regard, or as to whether he pleases his officials by consulting or bypassing them. That depends entirely on the style of the minister, who is free to adopt his own working methods. Of course, the Chair cannot intervene in this particular case.

The hon. member was not very explicit about the alleged impairment of his ability to discharge his duties as a member of Parliament in this House, and I think that is a very important aspect. I gather he did not feel his ability was considerably impaired or, for that matter, impaired at all. Therefore, it is difficult for me to determine that he might have a case of privilege.

The hon. member complains that he cannot obtain impartial information from officials. I think the hon. member could get the information he requires, if he persisted, from officials or from the minister. It is up to him to find ways of extracting that information from the government, its ministers or its services. I cannot help him in this particular regard through the process of a question of privilege. Therefore, I have to say that I do not find there is a prima facie case of privilege in the hon. member's question.

* * *

POINT OF ORDER

MR. WADDELL—ALLOCATION OF TIME DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I meant to raise this question before you got to the stage of questions of privilege. My point of order arises in relation to the question period.

It is my understanding that members in this part of the House would normally be allowed to ask four questions during the question period, but it seems that this principle has been steadily eroded during the last month or two. May I respectfully suggest that, if the first round of questions and answers were shorter, more members, especially those in the back benches, could ask questions. Perhaps hon. members should