

something that had been said which he regarded as defamatory. I believe the matter was settled out of court. I hope I will be understood if I say, just to show that my stand is a consistent one, that some 30 years ago I sued for libel in the Supreme Court of Ontario over certain things that had been written against me. My hon. friend to my right wants to know if I won. The answer is yes.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I hasten to add that the court ruled I had not been damaged, so all I received was \$1 and costs. Of course, when one hires a lawyer, costs are important.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to be clear on this. In my view, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) has every right, if he feels he has been treated in a defamatory way, to take action under the law. But I would argue that that is not the issue before us, and just as we should not be discussing any requirement on the part of the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) or the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) to put their seats on the line, neither should we be questioning the right of the Minister of Transport to seek action if he feels he has been libelled.

What is at issue—and Your Honour has already made that point and asked us to address ourselves to it—is whether the privileges of parliament, the privileges of the country which we represent, are interfered with or are violated when a minister of the Crown uses his weight as a minister to stop publication by certain newspapers in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That, to me, is the whole issue. I hope the discussion will stay on that issue and that we will not be tempted to get into too many things that members might like to say about the Minister of Transport or the hon. member for Leeds. The issue is very clear. Is it true, or is it not true, that the minister, by weight of his position as minister, was able to prohibit or prevent the publication of the *Canadian* magazine in two newspapers in Saskatchewan last Saturday and, if so, where does that fit into our rules?

I imagine that some who take part in this debate today may ask what Standing Order or what rule says that newspapers have the right to publish no matter what it is they print. The question of whether something that has been published is libellous is decided afterwards by the courts. But surely the right to stop publication, without going to court, is as serious as putting people in jail because they might do something, because of their thoughts or because of their opposition to the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that what this House should be doing is referring that simple question to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I have carefully read the proposed motion put

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yesterday by the hon. member for Peace River. That motion is based mainly, on the quotations attributed to the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont (Mr. Joyal), but there are references to other and related matters and it seems that it is the action of the Minister of Transport that is in question. Perhaps the motion ought to be reworded. I would be happier if it were and if we were dealing with the one simple issue: was it a violation of the rights of this parliament—more than the right of this parliament, the rights of this country—that we represent, to have the freedom to publish interfered with, as apparently was done by the action of the Minister of Transport?

Mr. Speaker, I said when I rose that I had only three things I wanted to say. Those are the three things. Let us have no more of this argument that members of the opposition lay their seats on the line. Let us not deny, no matter how strongly we may feel about the Minister of Transport on this side of the House, his right to go to the courts to seek redress for what he may feel to be libellous. But let us not in this House rest content, or rest at all, if the freedom of newspapers to publish in this country is being interfered with by the heavy hand of the Minister of Transport.

• (1540)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have a few words to say on this question, but I think a few words ought to be said. Perhaps what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said is correct: there is no Standing Order of the House which requires a member of parliament to take responsibility for his own utterances. That may be true. But surely there is a sense of honour—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paproski: What do you people know about honour?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: Surely there is a sense of honour which is more important than the Standing Orders. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is a rather distinguished member of the House, but other members of the House in the past have taken an entirely different view of this question, a view entirely different from that of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Andre: That is a specious argument.

Mr. MacEachen: Among them are two former prime ministers of Canada, one of them Sir Wilfrid Laurier who raised the point in a famous debate. The hon. member may recall, when he was absent from the House for a short period and was not a member of parliament, that there was a case before Mr. Speaker Michener in which the leader of the opposition of the day put down a motion asking the House of Commons to investigate the conduct of a particular member on the government side. That leader of the opposition was the late Mr. Pearson. He put a motion down asking that certain details of the conduct of an hon. member be investigated by the standing