

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 29, 1977

The House met at 2 p.m.

● (1407)

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

STATEMENT CONCERNING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBER FOR BONAVISTA-TRINITY-CONCEPTION

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before calling motions pursuant to Standing Order 43, I am sure hon. members would be concerned about allegations published since the House rose last evening of improper practices by the hon. member for Bonavista-Trinity-Conception (Mr. Rooney), and since these allegations relate to administrative procedures which fall under my area of responsibility I am sure hon. members would want to be informed of any actions which I propose to take.

On the general question of the supervision of the staff of members of the House of Commons, both here in Ottawa and in the constituency office, I think hon. members are aware that over the last some two years, almost since the inception of the Standing Committee on Management and Members' Services, I have been greatly aided by that committee and in turn by consultation with the commissioners of internal economy in attempting to supervise in an orderly way the utilization by members of the House of Commons of the various allowances that are available to them in order to enable them to carry out their responsibility to the electorate.

● (1412)

In some cases we have found that we have been able to improve some of the practices, or at least alter them, we hope, in an approved way, and in other cases where suggestions have been made for relaxation of practices we have resisted them and maintained a vigilance which we feel is our obligation in attempting to strike the very delicate balance that is so elusive to us between, on the one hand, the vigilance that we owe to the public since we are spending taxpayers' money, and, on the other hand, the freedom that has to be exercised in view of the extraordinary duties placed on all members of parliament which require a regime here which asks of members of the House of Commons that they report on a monthly basis that they are conforming to the requirements both in respect of their own actions and in respect of personnel, and, of course, the long established practice that when that word is given by any elected member of the House of Commons it is accepted by the administration.

So I say that in attempting to find that proper balance between our vigilance with regard to the taxpayer and the extraordinary requirements in respect of the 264 members of the House, we feel we have been able to achieve something

very close to the ideal, but of course we will continue the review. My point is that the review has been ongoing, in the hope that we have both come close to the ideal and established a regime which will enable us to maintain our vigilance.

In respect of the individual case in these particular circumstances, it is not for me nor, I am sure, for any other member of the House or of the public, to make a judgment in advance, and I do not do so. On the other hand, I feel sure that all hon. members would consider it my obligation in the circumstances, faced with the allegations contained in the article in the *Globe and Mail* this morning and made over the airwaves since the House rose last evening—I would consider it to be my minimum obligation—to ensure that a proper investigation is carried out. Therefore, after informing representatives of all parties this morning and the hon. member for Bonavista-Trinity-Conception (Mr. Rooney) of my intention to do so, I have authorized an immediate investigation by the RCMP into the allegations which were contained and published in various journals and over the radio and television in the last 24 hours. In my advice to the hon. member, of course, I have indicated that both before and after the announcement—I was attempting to reach his office but was unable to do so because of busy telephone lines over an extended period, so I have sent a note to him—if the hon. member wanted to discuss the matter with me, I would be available for him to do so.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INFORMATION

REQUEST FOR MEASURE TO ENSURE FREEDOM OF ACCESS— MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I have knowledge of a fact of urgent and pressing necessity which drives me to make a motion under Standing Order 43. Given the fact that it is almost two years since this House unani- mously approved freedom of information legislation: and that since then, there has been an epidemic of concealment and deception indicating this has been a way of life of the govern- ment, much of it based on false claims of security, I move:

That this House requests the government to abandon any attempt to appeal the decision of Associate Chief Justice Hugessen in connection with the Keable inquiry and instead to immediately introduce into parliament, legislation provid- ing for access to government information including a proper definition of "security," and "ministerial responsibility" in order to restore public confidence.