

PRIVILEGE

MR. BALDWIN—ALLEGED ATTEMPT BY GOVERNMENT TO INTERFERE WITH NEWS MEDIA

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, as required by the rules I have given Your Honour notice of a question of privilege and if you find there is a prima facie case I shall move a motion at the conclusion of my remarks. I do not think it will have escaped Your Honour's attention that in a motion under Standing Order 43 I raised a matter which in my submission is a very important area of privilege affecting every member of the House.

Your Honour is aware, as are members on both sides of the House, that we have been very careful not to restrictively define "question of privilege", leaving it to be modelled and to conform to situations as they may arise. It is my submission that the inalienable right of members of the House to discharge their responsibilities would be seriously interfered with if the free flow of information about what goes on in this House and in government were restricted by what I consider could be characterized as improper actions on the part of members of the government. It is on that basis that I think it is for the Chair to be bold and to find reasons to bring the rights of members of the House into conformity with modern day technology. It would be an assault on reality not to realize that in this day and age not to communicate what goes on in government to the public is a rejection of an essential privilege of the public, manifested through members of this House.

I have indicated several areas of complaint to the House and I will not go over them in detail again. There is the question of the abrasive actions taken by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his supporters in connection with the CBC. This has been a matter of discussion in the House and the subject of questions and motions. I will deal briefly with the allegation of the suppression of the June 4 weekend supplement in the two daily newspapers in Regina and Saskatoon. The *Canadian* carried an article entitled "The Unhappy Landing of Otto Lang". The Acting Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) indicated that he would make some inquiry into this and report back to the House. For that reason I will not pursue it any further at this time but I suggest the very fact that the Acting Prime Minister is prepared to do this is a prima facie indication that there is substance to the allegation.

● (1510)

I should like to quote from the article appearing in today's *Globe and Mail*, headed, "Liberal MP says party in panic since PQ win." Some statements in the article are in quotation marks, obviously indicating statements taken verbatim by the reporter reporting what the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont said. This is how the *Globe and Mail* puts it:

He told a group of journalists attending a seminar that the federal Government is deliberately and systematically trying to strip the courts of their power to interpret the laws of the country.

It is also trying to 'domesticate' and 'harness' the press in Canada because it fears the press and hasn't been able to control it.

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Mr. Joyal said the government is changing the rules of the democratic game without the knowledge of most people. "The very foundations of our society are involved," he said.

The article goes on to say:

Mr. Joyal said it is not simply coincidence that the federal government has introduced three pieces of legislation in which the court is no longer the final recourse to the interpretation of the law.

He went on to mention Bill C-42, the telecommunications legislation, the new immigration bill and the recently introduced bill relating to the question of privacy.

According to the article, the hon. member's position is as follows:

The government is also very much afraid of the press because 'the only opposition in Ottawa right now is the press' he said. He said it is the press that takes the case to the government, that digs up the contradictions and inaccuracies of cabinet ministers.

'There is a phobia in Ottawa, a fixed idea to domesticate this power of the press, to harness it', he said . . .

'There's often been criticism of the press before but never as much since Nov. 15. There is a feeling of panic about the press. We had to feel assured we wouldn't get a trick bounce out of the press' he said.

The article reports further comment along the same lines. I submit that almost any one of these incidents standing alone could be cause for concern; taken together, they constitute far more than a prima facie case that this government is moving to restrict the inalienable right of this House to see that the public is informed of the processes of government. The public must be informed both of what goes on in the House, and what goes on in government circles. The hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont suggests that what the government is doing is related to legislation before this House and before parliament, and indicates the government's motives. That in itself suggests that the government has made certain that more is included in its legislation than meets the eye of this House; that these legislative proposals are intended to restrict the rights of the courts to hear and interpret legislation this House passes.

I suggest in addition that this House has a vested interest in connection with the people involved in reporting what goes on in the House and the actions of government and parliament. I am referring to the press gallery, and the reporters, a group with which this House has had a longstanding and traditionally sensitive relationship. I suggest that any act, any proposal or any suggestion, as conveyed by the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont, that the government is involved in attempting to control the free flow of information strikes at the heart of the rights of members of this House.

Finally, it is suggested that the government is involved in diminishing the powers of the courts, to which parliament entrust the interpretation and judicial implementation of legislation enacted by Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons. That is a further blow at the powers of this House, and at the rights and privileges of individual members.

I will not continue at length. It is a simple case. I think the Chair must look carefully at the allegations, to see if there is not a course of conduct involved in these actions by which the privileges of all members of the House and the inalienable