

Privilege—Mr. Rae

The second point of my privilege is that this has nothing to do with the subject matter of the letter which went out over the signature of the Solicitor General of Canada. The letter sent out over the signature of the Solicitor General had to do with a multicultural grant under the multicultural grants program, and I cannot believe—and I wait for the minister to contradict me—that the question of what was best for the “region” of Broadview-Greenwood was discussed in cabinet, for the simple reason that the grant had nothing to do with the riding of Broadview-Greenwood any more than it had to do with the riding of any Member of Parliament in this House where the teaching of English as a second language is carried on. It is carried on in most constituencies in Canada and certainly in the vast majority of the constituencies in every urban region in Canada where the absorption of new Canadians is a question of great importance.

● (1600)

The second point of my privilege is that the minister appears to have been misleading the House in indicating, in his answer to the question with respect to these ministers, that their responsibilities concerned regional representation and the work carried out by the Solicitor General, the onerous task of signing a letter in which a cheque for \$15,568 was enclosed on behalf of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), had something to do with the representation of regional interest, when on its very face it had nothing to do with the representation of regional interest; it concerned something very different.

The third point of my privilege is that the minister indicated that these appointments were for the presentation or articulation of regional interest within cabinet. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism, who is the minister responsible for this grants program, is the Member of Parliament representing the riding of York West. The Solicitor General is the member of Parliament representing the riding of York Centre. These ridings are not exactly a million miles away from each other. In fact, they border on each other in northwestern Toronto. What I am saying is that the theory being put forward by the Minister of Finance that somehow this letter was part of the regional responsibilities of the Solicitor General just does not make any sense. The regional responsibilities of the Solicitor General respecting the riding of York Centre and neighbouring areas are exactly the same as those respecting the riding of York West represented by the Minister of State for Multiculturalism.

My fourth point really follows from this. Without asking you, Madam Speaker, to reconsider your decision, for which you gave no reasons last week, other than to simply indicate that, in your view, it was not a question of privilege, I would ask you to take a very careful look at the answer given by the Minister of Finance, as reported on page 7455 of *Hansard*. I have learned from listening to and watching the Minister of Finance, which is something my job requires me to do, that he chooses his words very carefully.

Mr. Nielsen: It is like watching those black spots.

Mr. Rae: As reported at page 7455, the minister said:

First of all, Madam Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada does not believe that any minister has been given responsibility for representing, in this House of Commons, any riding other than the riding for which he has been elected. That is the view of the Government of Canada.

Quite apart from the implausibility of that answer, the fact is that this letter went out. I refer to the phrase “in this House of Commons”, because the implication of those words is that the minister is responsible for my riding and for other ridings outside the House of Commons or at least is responsible in some other sense than within the confines of the House of Commons. I do not think Madam Speaker can rule on that question, with the greatest of respect, until such time as the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections has had an opportunity to examine and, indeed, to cross-examine precisely what is the nature of the duties carried out by the Solicitor General in keeping with the letter which went out over his signature.

For those four reasons it seems to me that one of the two ministers involved—the Minister of Finance who answered on February 19 or the Solicitor General who answered on February 18—has not been describing the duties indicated in the letter which went out on February 12. I will not put it any stronger than that; it is not for me to do so. But I think someone is being less than accurate in the description of the duties which were put forward.

In his answers on February 18, the Solicitor General did not say a single word with respect to his regional responsibilities. Apparently the thought had not occurred to him on February 18. The thought came to the government overnight, some time during the night of February 18 and the morning of February 19. The thought occurred to the government that the only way out of this quandary was to say that this was in keeping with traditional regional responsibilities, but this is in no way the nature of the answer given in the House on February 18.

As reported on page 7426 of *Hansard*, the Solicitor General, in answer to my question of privilege, outlined his own description of his duties. His description of those duties was quite different from the description given by the Minister of Finance a day later.

It seems to me there is a contradiction between these two answers, a contradiction of fact which, in my opinion, has the effect of misleading the House and myself. Neither description accords with the letter which went out over the signature of the Solicitor General on February 12, 1981.

The letter which would form part of a grant program had nothing to do with regional responsibilities, it had nothing to do with politics, but it should have had everything to do with the simple act of making an application to a government. It should have had nothing to do with partisan politics. It should have had nothing to do with whether one is a Liberal, a Conservative or a member of the NDP. There is a discrepancy between that letter which indicated that the minister was taking responsibility for activities within my riding and the answer given on February 18 by the Solicitor General, as well