

Privilege

It is important that this matter be considered in the context of the position taken by both Hon. Members, but it is also very important, in the view of the Chair, that this serious principle be addressed because it goes beyond the question of any one particular individual Member; it is a matter of grave importance for all of the committees that are operating in this place.

I therefore invite the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake to move an appropriate motion.

Mr. Felix Holtmann (Selkirk—Interlake): Mr. Speaker, in view of your findings, I move:

That the matter of disclosure by the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River of a recorded vote taken at an *in camera* meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, as reported to the House by the said committee on April 28, 1987, be referred to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, the ruling that you have made today is, in my view, an extremely important one. It is an important ruling for at least two reasons and probably many more than that, Sir.

First, I think that Hon. Members as a result of your ruling will have to give quite careful consideration as to whether it is in the best interests of Parliament and in the best interests of our work as publicly elected representatives to do our work *in camera*. The decision to go into an *in camera* meeting will have to be given much more careful consideration by each and every committee. On many occasions it has been done without the degree of thought and consideration that such a decision deserves. Is it really necessary and is it so important that Members work behind closed doors in strict confidentiality? That is the first point I want to make, and your ruling, I think, will impose on those who chair committees and who participate in decisions of committees that they give much more thought to this decision.

The second aspect of your ruling is that for the first time in the Canadian parliamentary tradition the due importance of *in camera* meetings has been underlined by you. I think Hon. Members in the past have perhaps considered that which goes on in *in camera* meetings too lightly but henceforth they will not be able to do so.

I come now to the third point. What still has to be considered by the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, as I understand your ruling, is whether there is a distinction between proceedings and a recorded vote. You indicated quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, that all of this went on within an *in camera* meeting and, therefore, the rules of *in camera* as outlined by Beauchesne are applicable.

It does seem that there is a bit of an anomaly herein that when you record something in an *in camera* meeting, that recording of a vote, of a division, among the members must be given confidentiality. That strikes me as a bit of an anomaly and I think it needs some sorting out.

The experience learned in the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is that committees cannot be sloppy in their procedures. Obviously there was a bit of sloppiness that took place at that particular meeting with which we are dealing. When an Hon. Member who was distressed by the decision that had been made within the committee called for a recorded vote, it was at that very moment that members should also have taken the precaution and the necessary step to ask the Chairman and the Clerk of the committee that the *in camera* situation be changed and it become a regular meeting. In fact, this very item was subsequently discussed in the committee, and that is now the practice.

The motion which will be referred to the Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure will establish important new precedents for the Canadian House of Commons. The lessons that can be learned from this for the work of committees will be important in the future. Committees will have to proceed with much more care about going *in camera*. If there is going to be a recorded vote they will have to take the necessary procedural step to make sure they are no longer *in camera* when the recorded vote is taken.

● (1540)

I thank Your Honour for the decision.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the Hon. Member. Is the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom) rising to speak?

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say that since the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry) is in our Party and we do not object to the motion, it should be put without any further debate so we can get back to the Opposition Day debate.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) who is, as I said earlier, a distinguished senior Member of this place. His comments are helpful.

The question that I now have to put to the House is: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion (Mr. Holtmann) agreed to.