

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Monday, June 9, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

### VACANCY

**Mr. Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the house that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely, of Edward Richard Schreyer, member for the electoral district of Selkirk, by resignation.

Accordingly I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer to make out a new writ of election for this constituency.

### PRIVILEGE

MR. McGRATH—COMPLAINT RESPECTING PRESS ARTICLE DISCUSSING COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF SEAL HUNT—MOTION TO REFER

**Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to rise on a question of privilege affecting all members of this house. My question of privilege arises from an article by John Gray in the *Montreal Star* of June 3 which, I understand, has been given wide distribution throughout the country by a certain group and which has only now come to my attention. It deals with the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry. This is the first opportunity I have had to raise this question of privilege because, as I have indicated, the article came to my attention only this morning.

The article in question concerns the hearings held by the Parliamentary Committee on Fisheries and Forestry on the subject of seal hunting in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I intend to back up my question of privilege with a motion.

To indicate that I have a very sincere and genuine question of privilege I need only to quote several sentences from the article by Mr. Gray. They read as follows:

Throughout their hearings on the seal hunt, the committee has functioned like a hanging jury in a kangaroo court. As usually happens in such cases, and as is evident in the report, they got the verdict they wanted.

The committee, dominated by Maritimers and led by a small core of Newfoundlanders, was determined to vindicate the annual slaughter of baby seals. For even the relatively few Atlantic fishermen who take part in the seal hunt, the extra

cash they earn is a happy bonus in a desperate economy.

To accomplish their purpose the committee members proceeded with vigour. They maligned and insulted opponents of the seal hunt; they accepted unquestioningly the testimony of witnesses whom they liked, and rejected the testimony which did not accord with their prejudices.

I believe that the article in question casts a reflection on every member of the committee and on every member of the house. It accuses the committee of deliberate dishonesty and of perpetrating a deliberate injustice and, in my view, is clearly in contempt of parliament.

I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) that:

The article in the *Montreal Star* of Tuesday, June 3 by John Gray entitled "Seal Probers Lack Comprehension" be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, to determine whether such matter is a violation of the privileges of this house.

**Mr. Speaker:** The question of the privileges of members of parliament is, of course, a very serious matter, and one of the responsibilities of the Speaker, who is acting on behalf of hon. members, is to ensure that these privileges are protected. Of course it is not always easy to establish a happy medium between the two requirements in our democratic society, that is the right of individual members of the House of Commons to be protected in the discharge of their responsibilities and, as a counterpart, the rights and privileges of the press to express themselves freely.

• (2:10 p.m.)

The article to which the hon. member referred is obviously rather strong in tone, and I should like to have an opportunity to look at it a little more closely. If hon. members have comments to make on the proposal of the hon. member for St. John's East that the article, or the matter in question, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections I would be pleased to hear their views; we should not, of course, go into the matter too deeply; we do not want at this time to revive the debate on the substance of the matter considered by the committee.