

Privilege—Mr. Beatty

Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) that this is purely debate. If the hon. member is not satisfied or does not agree with something that a minister or a member of this House has said in this House, it does not constitute a question of privilege.

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. gentleman that I am not ready to withdraw the remark. Quite to the contrary. I listened to Mr. Tarnapolsky on the program "Cross-Country Checkup". He indicated quite clearly that he supported the measures being introduced and debated in this House.

I might say that once the committee stage is reached I would suggest the committee call Mr. Tarnapolsky to appear to discuss the matter—he has agreed to go—and I am sure the hon. gentleman will see that my statement was well founded.

Madam Speaker: I cannot allow the hon. member for Burnaby to speak twice on this question of privilege, which I feel is not a question of privilege. It is a matter of disagreement as to the interpretation made of certain remarks outside the House, from what I can gather. Therefore, there is no prima facie case of privilege in this particular circumstance.

MR. BEATTY—ENERGY ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, last Friday afternoon I asked your permission to reserve my right to raise a question of privilege after I had had an opportunity to review the transcript of your ruling on the question of privilege raised by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

As you will recall, Madam Speaker, my colleague's question of privilege arose from the massive advertising campaign which was begun last summer at the taxpayers' expense to promote the Trudeau government's constitutional initiatives. The substance of the hon. member's concern was that the spending of millions of dollars by the government to promote policies that did not have the support of both sides of this House constituted an attack upon the privileges of members.

Your ruling last Friday was extremely helpful in that it gave the House an indication of what you felt would be necessary, before spending on an advertising campaign by the government, to constitute a question of privilege. While you clearly saw the threats posed in the government's dangerous new entry into advocacy advertising—which is the selling of a particular, disputable, point of view—through the use of quantities of tax dollars that are so large they cannot be matched by groups with opposing views, you said that this action, in itself, did not constitute prima facie grounds for a question of privilege.

Your ruling provides an extremely useful guidance for members about what sort of conditions would have to exist before such an advertising campaign could give rise to a question of privilege.

The relevant part of your ruling, Madam Speaker, which is recorded at page 3781 of *Hansard* for October 17, 1980, reads as follows:

The spending of public money cannot be the issue, but when a person or a government attempts to interfere with our deliberations through spending public money, or otherwise, directly or indirectly, or acts in contempt of the House, such action would constitute a prima facie case. However, the interference must be such that the member or the House is truly hindered or intimidated.

A second possible basis for a question of privilege was also mentioned in your ruling, namely, that such advertising representations, and I quote:

—a publication of false, perverted, partial or injurious reports of the proceedings of the House of Commons or misrepresentations of members.

While it can easily be demonstrated that the government is using tax dollars for an advertising campaign that is replete with false information about energy in Canada, the advertisements do not represent these falsehoods as the position of Parliament or as the policy of individual members. A strict construction of the grounds necessary for a question of privilege to exist would not include the fact that the government is using millions of dollars to spread false information at the taxpayers' expense. This dangerous abuse of tax dollars would have to be opposed by methods other than by the raising of a question of privilege. As the House will be aware, Mr. Murray Coolican of the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee has laid complaints against the government, listing the numerous falsehoods contained in the advertisements, with the Advertising Standards Council and the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

For this matter to be raised in the House of Commons, it would have to be dealt with in the context either of debate or of the question period. As your ruling quite properly makes clear, such misleading advertising would not constitute a question of privilege unless it could be shown that it misrepresented the opinions or activities of Parliament or its members.

This brings us to the other conditions you outlined, Madam Speaker, where a government advertising program would present sufficient grounds to justify a question of privilege. I would remind the House of your exact words as reported in *Hansard* at page 3781 as follows:

—when a person or a government attempts to interfere with our deliberations through spending public money, or otherwise, directly or indirectly, or acts in contempt of the House, such action would constitute a prima facie case.

It is my intention to demonstrate that the energy advertising campaign currently being run by the government was, in fact, designed to interfere with our deliberations through spending public money. I will show that the campaign was designed and initiated well in advance of the unveiling of the government's energy package which is to be revealed in the Minister of Finance's budget next week. The purpose of the campaign includes preventing members of this House from discharging their responsibility to have, in the words of Your Honour, productive debate on the government's energy policies. In this regard I remind the House of Your Honour's statement at page 3780 of *Hansard*.

The original purpose of this privilege was, as the hon. member for St. John's East rightly pointed out, to guarantee the conditions necessary for productive debate.