

Privilege—Mr. Fulton

[English]

PRIVILEGE**MR. FULTON—ALLEGED MISLEADING MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) now want to respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton)?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Yes, I do, Madam Speaker. I know what the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) had to say, and I can only comment that the offence he seems to have taken is with reference to a conversation which he had with me in the House in which I indicated that I would be pleased to talk to him again about the panel of experts looking into the Alice Arm's situation. That is quite true. I thought that there would be an opportunity to talk to him further before a final statement was made by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc) and myself, knowing, as I did, that it would be made very shortly.

I did not anticipate, at the time of the deliberations between my colleague and myself, that a statement would be ready by the next day. When I did become aware of this, I looked around very quickly to see if the hon. member was there, in order to give him some indication of what was forthcoming, but I did not have the opportunity to do so. I think that it is simply a question of not having had the time necessary to talk to the hon. member again. May I indicate, however, that I have been talking to the hon. member off and on, trying to find a position that would be acceptable to all concerned, and I have endeavoured to continue to do that to the best of my ability, taking into consideration the constraints of time.

I would hope that that would be an explanation of the so-called offence which the hon. member has taken with reference to the fact that he was not consulted again, prior to the announcement having been made.

I will conclude by saying that it seems to me that my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans—who has the paramountcy of responsibility in this particular area along with myself—has strived valiantly to meet many of the areas of real concern which have been expressed, not only by hon. members but certainly by the Nishga people with respect to public participation and the calibre of people on the scientific panel.

Also I have indicated to all concerned that we do not hesitate to make adequate funding available so that they can make well-researched presentations to this very high calibre scientific panel looking into the question. I hope negotiations will carry on so that we can have a meeting of minds with respect to the matter.

I take this opportunity to give this explanation on the basis that it might afford some understanding of the background.

May I just conclude by saying that, of course, we all know it is not a question of privilege in the first place.

Mr. Fulton: On the question of privilege, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: No, I cannot hear the hon. member because he has already intervened on this question of privilege. But I am rising to say that I simply cannot remember the foundation of the point of privilege raised by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton), because the question is a few days old, and also I cannot remember the arguments which he brought forward also owing to the fact that his question of privilege relates to events which go back to last summer.

I just have to reserve my ruling on this question of privilege. It looks as though it is an explanation between the two hon. members; but I will reserve, at any rate, and rule on it later.

The hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) on a question of privilege.

MR. HUNTINGTON—ACCESS BY MEMBERS TO PRESS LOCK-UP ON ESTIMATES

Hon. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Thank you, Madam Speaker, I have given you notice of privilege this morning. My privilege is that as a Member of Parliament, and particularly, as the official opposition new spokesman or critic of the Treasury Board, I was denied access to a lock-up for the press gallery, and members of the press this morning at eleven o'clock in Room 200 of the West Block.

In the past, members, elected or otherwise, have been allowed access to briefing sessions on the budget in advance of the presentation of the budget in the House, so that the spokesmen and the critics could properly prepare themselves and perform their functions in an efficient and effective manner.

As a former chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, we had the privilege of working with the Auditor General in the tabling of the Auditor General's report, which was a highly secret document until it was tabled by the Speaker in the House of Commons.

● (1510)

Much time was spent in debate on the question of Members of Parliament having access to the lock-up along with members of the press. In the wisdom of the committee at that time, and I believe with the full sanction of the House and the Speaker, Members of Parliament were allowed into the press lock-up so long as they left the Auditor General's report in the room with their name on it. The Auditor General's report would then be delivered to their desks in the House. In this way, members dealing with the Auditor General's report were at least allowed a sense of honour and duty and were given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with a very important document and with the issues involved.

It is my opinion that the action taken today by Treasury Board, which plans the expenditure programs of government and approves the programs of government, is in contempt of Parliament. Interested members with a meaningful role to play in the process of Parliament have been denied access to the