

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

consultation with the Department or the Department has been in consultation with them. They have known the intricacies of the papers and material the Minister will be making public tomorrow. They have given advice to the department. It is not a question of whether these people have given advice on a little area here or there or have given advice on broad social or policy areas. These are experts in law and in the tax system. They have been asked to advise on the wording of particular measures, how particular aspects of the documents that will be released tomorrow will actually work when implemented.

I am sure the Department of Finance will have asked these people what effect it will have on the market if the document is worded in certain ways, what opportunities will there be—

Mr. Speaker: I hate to interrupt the Hon. Member and I will certainly let him continue, but the Hon. Member has been putting forth a series of rhetorical questions. The Chair would like him to address the question that is before it, and that is, under what circumstances can a Government go into the private sector, swear people to secrecy and take their advice and their efforts as help in the preparation of matters of finance. Is the Hon. Member saying that that cannot be done under any circumstances or is there something about this particular matter which goes to the question of whether or not there has been a breach of the privilege of Members?

Perhaps I am not completely understanding the Hon. Member, but I felt that the effect of what he was saying is that no Government could go to outside sources even though those sources are sworn to secrecy, because what they learn may in one way or another give them some advantage over someone else at some future time.

● (1640)

I am having some difficulty in understanding how you can ever have a situation where, one way or another, for at least a short period of time, these advisors will not have some kind of advantage over others in their field. It seems to me that advantage goes with the fact they have been selected to assist. The Chair is having a little bit of difficulty understanding how you could ever have a situation where you seek advice and the advisor does not then have some knowledge that someone else did not have. I am having difficulty with that being a barrier to receiving advice.

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, the point I wanted to establish very clearly is that these people are now in a position of advantage. That is a very crucial and important point. They will know the intricacies of the document long before Members of Parliament, the general public, and their professional peers.

Mr. Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt again but we have been listening to a good deal of discussion, all of which is helpful. But let us assume for the moment that they are in a position of advantage. Please direct your thoughts and argument, which is cogent and helpful, to whether or not that is a breach of the privilege of Members of this House. Perhaps the Hon. Member could help me on that.

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, that was the second point I wanted to deal with, the role of advisors to the Government. I do not object to that. In fact, I encourage and congratulate the Minister for having wider consultation than the previous Government. That Government ran into quite a few problems because it did not do that. I think of the scientific research tax credit where the Department of Finance did not consult and did not have the street smarts to deal with the people who took advantage of this measure at a cost to Canadian taxpayers of well over \$3 billion. That is a prime example of the need for outside consultation.

I would now like to ask this question. What kind of consultation can there be 24 hours before the document is released? That is the key question. I understand consultations from time to time, but to see the final document is to know what advice the Government has or has not taken. These people are now in a position of being more than just advisors and consultants. They now know what the final decision is. They have seen the complete document.

My second concern about their advisory role is what further role is there for them? My understanding is that they are to fan out across the country—their role as advisors is not finished. They are to give seminars and explain exactly what is in the package and what the Government means. Therefore, is the Government expanding the very needed role of advisors to that of propagandists for the proposal? In that sense surely there is a breach of our privilege.

On the one hand these individuals have been used as advisors in the preparation of these documents. On the other hand, we in the Opposition will not have had detailed information, yet we will be required after only eight hours in the lock-up to respond to the document. We may very well be facing people who have had knowledge of these documents many days before.

Mr. Cassidy: Or months.

Mr. de Jong: Or months. That puts the Opposition in a very disadvantaged position.

I ask you to consider these two vital elements. There is no disagreement that the Government should have advisors. Yet is their role of advisor finished and another role begun when they see the documents 24 or 48 hours before they are released? Second, what is their role in fanning out across the country to speak on these documents? Those are the two important factors you have to consider and I submit that our privilege has been breached and that the Government and Minister seriously erred in this procedure.

If the Minister wishes to institutionalize the practice of having advisors, which I encourage him to do, he should do so by consulting with the House as a whole so we can help him do it while ensuring that our privileges are not breached and that these people will not be in a position of having an unfair advantage.