

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 4, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. BROADBENT—ALLEGED FAILURE OF MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, TRADE AND COMMERCE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which concerns the failure of a minister to provide information to members of the House which legitimately he should provide.

Yesterday, while searching through the material related to the application by Bell Canada to the Canadian Transport Commission for increased telephone rates, I found a document dated December 28, 1972, presented by Bell Canada to the Canadian Transport Commission. It contains an item identified as No. 15 which reads as follows: "IRDIA grants credited to expense account, \$1,212,482." This means that Bell Canada has declared in a public document that in 1972 it received federal grants administered by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce in the amount of \$1.2 million.

On January 4 of this year I put on the order paper a question asking for the names of recipients of grants under IRDIA and the amounts paid. On March 7 the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gillespie) tabled his answer, which reads in part as follows:

Section 13 of the Industrial Research and Development Incentives Act prevents the disclosure of this information.

My first point of privilege is that the members of the House of Commons are refused by the government information involving an expenditure of some \$165 million since 1967 under the pretext of statutory secrecy, while a recipient of these grants, in this particular case Bell Canada, is at liberty to divulge the same information in a public document.

The second point of privilege arises from the fact that the minister is using the Industrial Research and Development Incentives Act to withhold inappropriately requested information from members of this House and the public. The minister—and this is the important point here—referred to section 13 of the act. Section 13 reads as follows:

All information with respect to a corporation obtained by an officer or employee of Her Majesty in the course of the administration of this Act is privileged, and no such officer or employee shall knowingly, except as may be necessary for the purposes of sections 11 and 12 or in respect of proceedings relating to the administration or enforcement of this Act, communicate or allow to be communicated to any person not legally entitled thereto any such information or allow any such person to inspect or have access to any application or other writing containing any such information.

The point I want to make is that the information requested by me does not involve information obtained by

the department from the corporation but information which had been generated by the department itself, namely, the amount of the taxpayers' money which the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, in his wisdom, had decided to give corporations. I maintain that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce is therefore incorrectly using section 13 of the act to prevent members of the House and the public from finding out who is getting multimillion dollar grants from the federal treasury.

Therefore, if Your Honour agrees that this is a legitimate question of privilege—I think it is and I am sure you will agree—I would move that this matter be referred immediately to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker: I think I should advise the hon. member immediately that I have to disappoint him; I do not agree that this kind of question is a question of privilege that ought to be referred to a standing committee of the House and, in particular, to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

By way of introduction to the brief remarks I will make regarding the hon. member's proposed motion, I might say that the notice he filed with the Chair earlier today is not, I suggest, entirely within or does not fulfil the requirements of the Standing Order. Hon. members are required by the Standing Order to indicate to the Chair, for the guidance of the Chair, the substance of the matter that they propose to raise by way of a question of privilege. I think I should suggest to the hon. member that it is not sufficient, and it does not fulfil the requirements of the Standing Order, simply to say that he proposes to raise a question of privilege having reference to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. But I say this only in passing; it is not the substance of the comments I propose to make.

The hon. member claims that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce is not supplying him or the House with certain information, which the hon. member claims the minister is required to do. I suggest respectfully to the hon. member that that is debate between himself and the minister. I really do not think it would be conducive to effective study and consideration of the business of the House if, every time a minister refused to give information for one reason or another and an hon. member felt that the information ought to be supplied to the House, the dispute were to be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. That committee, I suggest, would then be overloaded with the business of dealing with such questions. I think this is a matter of argument between the hon. member and the minister.