

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 4, 1964

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. DOUGLAS—PRESS REPORT OF SPEECH BY
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which affects all members of the house. It has to do with a Canadian Press dispatch of this morning regarding a meeting which was held in the Toronto area last night and addressed by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition. It says in part:

Noting that Prime Minister Pearson had threatened an election if parliamentary business does not progress, Mr. Diefenbaker suggested this was a ruse.

"The Prime Minister knows he stands in no danger from his allies (the Social Credit, Creditiste and New Democratic parties)...because of the increase in (M.P.'s) indemnity to \$18,000 a year".

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Douglas: The report continues:

"It had a wonderful effect on third party support".

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Douglas: It continues:

"On the flag vote", he said, "the attitude would be, not that I love the red ensign less, but \$18,000 more".

Mr. Pigeon: The same old bunch.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, the rules of this house assume that every member has a right to take whatever position he or she wishes on any question on the basis that they are acting in accordance with their convictions and their conscience, and it does not lie within the power of any member to impute motives to other members or to insinuate that they are acting from ulterior or sinister motives. I suggest that this statement is a reflection not only on the three parties which sit to the left of the official opposition but impugns the motives of all members of this house who may disagree about the design of the proposed flag. The great bulk of the Conservative members in this house, with the exception of a small handful, voted for an

increase in the sessional indemnity, and the implication would be that any of them who vote for a design other than the red ensign are also doing so out of considerations based upon the sessional indemnity.

I do not raise this on any basis of personal resentment, Mr. Speaker. I say this is a reflection on the integrity of all members of the house. What is to my mind even worse, it helps to feed the cheap cynicism that is all too prevalent with reference to parliament and its membership.

I recognize that the right hon. Leader of the Opposition may have been misquoted, and if so I hope he will make that clear to the house. Or it may be that he spoke in the heat of a campaign meeting and that he will want to retract his statement. All of us have had the experience of being carried away by the exuberance of our own eloquence and having said things that we later regretted. If that is true, then I hope the Leader of the Opposition will make a retraction.

The right hon. gentleman is an old and experienced parliamentarian. He is a former distinguished prime minister of this country, and no one knows better than he that he cannot impugn the motives of other members. He may call in question their judgment, but he cannot reflect on their integrity. I ask him to give this house either an explanation or an apology.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in so far as the statement made by the hon. member is concerned, may I say that there were no motives imputed whatsoever or in any way. I have consistently taken a stand against the increase that was voted. I made that clear again last evening when I spoke. If that is imputing motives to hon. members of this house I do not know what motives are. I took a strong and very definite stand against the circumstances under which the increase took place. I took the stand that no such increase should be made effective by members of the house voting for it. I pointed out at the time the dangers inherent in that course. I am unchanged in that view and will remain so, and any suggestion on the part of