

Privilege, Mr. Lewis

● (1410)

MR. LEWIS—BUGGING OF NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY
CAUCUS MEETING

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) rising on a question of privilege?

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am. I rise on a very serious question of privilege. I appreciate that I have not given Your Honour notice as required by the rules, but I did not learn about the matter I want to raise until literally 12 minutes ago when the bells were already ringing.

I do not want to make a mountain out of this but it does concern a very important matter of privilege affecting the House of Commons, parliament and all members of parliament. I learned at about two o'clock—I grin a little about it because of events that have happened elsewhere—that we had a bug at our caucus meeting this morning. During the meeting of the caucus the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), who is our caucus chairman, pulled a little mike out from under the table, put it on top of the table, and said to me and to others: "This looks like a bugging device". Having no knowledge of such things, I could not tell him whether it was or not and we went on with the meeting. However, the person responsible for placing that bug there, a journalist working for the CTV network—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: —was honest enough to come up to me at about two o'clock and inform me that they had done this in connection with a program that they have in mind, to be aired in the month of November, in which they will be attempting to show, so he informed me, how easy bugging a meeting is, and how important legislation to deal with the matter may be.

Whatever purpose, admirable or not, the people responsible for this in the CTV network may have had in mind, I suggest to you, Sir, that it is a violation of everything I can think of in connection with the privileges of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Whether or not it is illegal under the present Criminal Code, or any other statute of which I may not know, is irrelevant. Certainly it is totally illegal as far as the rules of parliament are concerned. I hope that those responsible will not find it more offensive than I intend it to be when I say that it is morally and socially wrong in every respect for them to have done this.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: No member of parliament, no politician, certainly not a leader of a political party, wants to alienate anybody in the fourth estate or fifth estate, or maybe all four or five estates that they now represent, as I sometimes think. But I believe that the search for news and for spectacular things in the news, particularly as far as television is concerned, should no longer justify and never should have justified the kind of action which is considered by everybody with any sense of propriety to be indecent and anti-social.

[Mr. Speaker.]

I have no motion to move, Mr. Speaker, though I am going to suggest something in a moment. I am not worried about what happened at the caucus or about the publicity it receives. I am certain that the people concerned, when they were honest enough to tell me about it, will be honourable enough to deal with the matter in a way which we will approve rather than in a manner which would be wrong. However, that is not the point. The point is that everyone in this country, every member of the press gallery and every other person concerned ought to know that this parliament will not stand for that kind of behaviour.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Even though I have the assurance from the person concerned that the tape will be brought to us, as a mark of official action by the House, if Your Honour considers there is a point of privilege. I would move that the person concerned be ordered by this parliament to deliver that tape either to Your Honour or to me, whichever you think more appropriate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the question of privilege raised by the Leader of the New Democratic Party. As the Chair is aware, I and other members on this side of the House have spoken to this matter on more than one occasion in the past. Indeed, Your Honour has caused two investigations that I know of to be conducted into allegations that bugging activities were taking place within the confines of the House of Commons and other buildings.

The example that has been exposed by the Leader of the New Democratic Party brings to the fore once again a situation which I, and I am sure all other hon. members, believe to be deplorable in the extreme. I am not satisfied that the activity is not more extensive and is as isolated as the instance which has been mentioned by the Leader of the New Democratic Party, particularly since the evidence which the standing committee examining the bill dealing with this matter has received indicates there have been well over 1,000 instances where telephone taps or electronic interventions on telephone apparatus have been placed by the police forces of this country.

I would go further than the hon. member for York South and suggest once again, particularly in light of the circumstances disclosed here today by him, that Your Honour cause a further investigation to be made into the whole matter of eavesdropping and electronic devices being placed on members' telephones and in offices as well as in their caucus committee rooms. I do not think it is enough that the House simply order the tape to be produced by the offender. This offence is serious enough to require the offender to come before the bar of the House and give an explanation of the whole affair.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: The House has the power to so order. I am not going to suggest anything other than that the Chair consider that course of action at this time. This is certainly not something that can be sloughed off by the mere production of a tape. It is an extremely serious affair and