

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

and behind closed doors, to the extent that they cannot and will not be able to get in touch with their offices, their wives and their children, that even when they go to the washroom they will be accompanied by guards, as is the practice when they are in a Budget lock-up, or tomorrow when Members will gather in a room to examine this question and kept incommunicado until 8 p.m.? Will these 20 privileged people mentioned in today's newspapers be allowed to sleep at home tonight, or will they be locked up in the same room, unable to communicate with the outside world? Mr. Speaker, I have already been led to believe that some of them did in fact get in touch with their offices.

What we are questioning here, Mr. Speaker, and I am not suggesting that these people have revealed the contents—

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Speaker: If I understood the Hon. Member correctly, he seems to be indicating that he has some information that some of these people who have sworn an oath of secrecy have already contacted their offices. This puts the Chair in a great deal of difficulty. If that is so, then somebody has breached their oath.

I want to be sure whether that is, in effect, what the Hon. Member is putting forward as a fact, other than perhaps some rumour that he has heard.

[Translation]

Mr. Garneau: Mr. Speaker, what I said is this, and I want to repeat it: I did not suggest that these people had revealed the contents.

[English]

I never said that they talked about the content. My argument is in the context of the lock-up. Tomorrow, some of our colleagues will be in a lock-up with research people. We will be kept there from noon until eight o'clock. We will not even be able to go to the bathroom without a guard. That is the rule of the lock-up.

Today, there are 20 specialists who received the privilege of reading the White Paper before any other Member of the House. I am asking the Minister whether the same rule that we are going to follow tomorrow will apply? Will those people stay in their hotel room or a room somewhere on Parliament Hill or in the Minister's office? Will they be there under guard, with no communication?

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I submit, the question of privilege I am raising is that 20 people are now aware of a document which will not be made public until tomorrow, and it is to that extent that I believe the privileges of the House have been breached.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister referred to consultations a few times. Consultations may open the way to a number of options, and the difference between consultation, with which I agree,

and what is going on now is that the people who are consulted have no idea what the Minister's decision will be. While today, the 20 privileged individuals who have gathered somewhere in the Department of Finance are not there to give advice, but to get acquainted with the decisions which have been taken and in that sense they are violating the privileges of this House, since no member, except the Minister or perhaps members of the Cabinet, but certainly no private member of this House has looked at that document.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that there is a breach of the privileges of this House. It is an extremely serious matter and the Leader of the Opposition has raised several points of order and quoted several precedents. Before concluding, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put to you the following question: Why today and not tomorrow? Why have those privileged individuals met today instead of being subjected to a confidential in camera meeting tomorrow with all the others. Why give them that privilege? I think that we cannot question the intellectual honesty of those people, the tax specialists who have been consulted. If we can question something, it is the judgment of the Minister of Finance who allowed those highly qualified persons to be placed in an untenable position. So I rise on a point of order and I believe that there has been a breach of my privileges and if I must question the judgment of someone, it is unfortunately that of the Minister of Finance who allowed such a thing to happen.

[English]

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I will not take too long in this debate because I believe the Hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) has made most of the relevant points. However, I want to reiterate one or two points.

The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) has alleged that there are newspaper articles indicating that certain professionals have advance information and that they are going to seek to use this to undue advantage. He went on to cite what we all have come to know as various political controversies over whether or not a budget leak has occurred and whether anything politically harmful has been flowing from that budget leak. I compliment him on his excellent research, but there is absolutely no guilt by association and there is absolutely no question of privilege.

My hon. colleague, the Minister of Finance, has indicated that he is bringing forward a White Paper. No one in the House knows why there is a Ways and Means Motion connected to it and I am sure that this will become evident tomorrow. I am sure there are reasons for that, knowing the Minister of Finance. He is bringing forward proposals for consideration by the taxpayer, by the public, and by this Parliament.

I do take exception to one thing. As a professional, both a chartered accountant and a lawyer, I am sure that the individuals who the Hon. Minister of Finance asked to come to Ottawa to assist in this process could probably have made a lot