

Privilege—Mr. Milliken

House of Commons with spurious calls for the resignation of the Minister of Finance.

An Hon. Member: Who started it?

Mr. Beatty: The Liberals say that it is a cover-up.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): My colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare—

An Hon. Member: What a hypocrite.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): The Hon. Member was making a rather voluble point about an event that occurred in the House some time ago.

An Hon. Member: Thirteen years ago.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Thirteen years ago. It was an event that was of great concern to many of us. It indicated in fact a time when there was the kind of disunion and tumult in this House that none of us wants to see again.

I did have a role to play in those events. The role that I had to play in those events was not to lead people in a charge upon the Chair. The role that I played in those events was to try to do everything I could to restrain Members who were outraged at the procedures at that time from storming the Chair. That is the record. Those are the facts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): In any event we sought a means by which we could make regular a process—

An Hon. Member: You were not too successful.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Like the Hon. Member I share with the Hon. Member the distinction of not always having been successful. I share with the Hon. Member the desire to try to encourage some order in this House and some fidelity to the record of the House. His colleague, I am sure in an error of youth, misremembered events of several years ago and I took the opportunity to set the record straight.

There are two final points that I would like to make. One is that we sought the co-operation of the House of Commons once this problem had arisen, to ensure that we could act in a way that would respect the economic interests of Canada and that would respect the traditions and the rights of the House of Commons of Canada. That co-operation was denied, but, Sir, I think that was irresponsible on behalf of the opposition Parties.

However, that is not the issue here. The issue here is whether the Minister of Finance acted appropriately in these extraordinary circumstances. The record is clear, the record is clear. Whether it is judged against all of the precedents of all of the Parliaments of our tradition, or whether it is judged against other events that have occurred in this House, the record is clear that the Minister of Finance in these extraordinary circumstances acted openly, acted decisively, and acted with his customary honour.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): It would be absurd for him to resign because some thief stole the document. That would be absurd. Every precedent of Parliament says he should continue. That is important, but in addition to every precedent of Parliament saying that the Minister of Finance should continue, his conduct in that office as an extraordinary and outstanding servant of this country and this Government and in this House indicate that it is in the interest of this nation that he be allowed to continue and that we get on with the business of Canada and stop this kind of partisan diversion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, this is the second occasion I have had to rise in this House on a question of privilege in the course of this session.

An Hon. Member: What happened to the first one?

Mr. Milliken: We will soon find out. The Speaker has not ruled on the present one, but frankly I am dismayed that both of the occasions have involved the principal business of the House of Commons, namely, financial matters.

The first question raised on April 6, as Your Honour will recall, dealt with the question of the Business of Supply. Today we are dealing with the second item of business under financial matters, Ways and Means. What the Government has done is effectively damage the rights of the Members of this House to deal with both these cardinal issues that under the Constitution are the most important single items with which this House is called upon to deal.