

Question of Privilege

VACANCY

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the house that I am in receipt of a communication informing me that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely of J. C. Van Horne, Esquire, member for the electoral district of Restigouche-Madawaska, by resignation.

Accordingly I have issued my warrant to the chief electoral officer for the issue of a new writ of election for the said electoral district.

PRIVILEGE

MR. MARTIN, ESSEX EAST—REPORT OF
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise a matter which I believe involves a question of privilege affecting every hon. member of this house. It has to do with the tabling of the report of the advisory committee of the unemployment insurance commission by the Minister of Labour in the dying hours of the day when we adjourned prior to Christmas.

On December 6 I asked this question of the Minister of Labour as reported at page 527 of *Hansard* of that date:

Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Minister of Labour whether the advisory committee of the unemployment insurance commission has had any meetings since the prorogation of parliament and, if there has been a meeting of that committee, will the minister kindly table the report in accordance with the direction provided in the act?

The minister replied, at page 527:

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the way it will be tabled.

Then I asked a supplementary question, as follows:

When might we expect the report to be tabled?

The minister replied, at page 528:

The act provides that it shall be tabled 30 days after it has been received by the governor in council.

Mr. Pickersgill: Within 30 days.

Mr. Starr: Yes, within 30 days.

On December 20 I again asked the Minister of Labour a question in this connection in the following words, which will be found at page 969 of *Hansard*:

May I ask the Minister of Labour if he is now in a position to table the report of the advisory committee of the unemployment insurance commission? The committee met in October, and about it there have already been questions this session?

The minister replied:

No. I am not prepared to table it yet, as the government is still studying this report.

I am advised by the Clerk's office, Mr. Speaker, that the day after, the minister did

[Mr. MacLean (Queens).]

hand to the Clerk a copy of this report, sessional paper No. 83, Wednesday, December 21. That was the day the spokesman for the opposition was concluding what he had to say about the budget introduced the day before by the Minister of Finance.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is not the first time this practice has been resorted to by this particular minister or by the government. In the dying days of the session which ended on August 10 last a report was tabled in the same manner—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think the hon. member should introduce more than one matter of privilege at the present time. He should confine himself to the matter under discussion.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Having said that there was a self-created precedent on the part of the minister for this particular act, I will agree that there is no point in elaborating on this aspect of the matter; but, Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that it is contrary to the privileges of this house, when, the day after a member asks for the production of a particular report and the minister says that the government has not yet studied it, the minister clandestinely hands the report to the Clerk without advising the house publicly, as I believe he should. It is a violation of the rules of this house. I can well understand why it was done, because the report shows—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member will agree with me that he should state his question of privilege without debating the matter. There is no motion before the house, and I have to determine whether there is a prima facie breach of privilege.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I simply add that I can understand why the minister would want to do it. I do not have to give further reasons why I think he would want to show that, because of convenience, he was justified in acting as he did, but the proper practice would have been for the minister to tell the house that he was going to table a document which was so vital in the consideration of matters affecting the financial state of this nation and of the unemployment insurance fund.

Hon. Michael Starr (Minister of Labour): Under the circumstances in which the hon. member for Essex East has brought this matter up, I think I should say a few words. When I made the statement on December 20, in reply to the question of the hon. member for Essex East, it certainly was my intention to table the document within the time prescribed in the act. On the following day I