

Hansard—Altering of Report

It is of vital importance that the integrity of the debates be fully protected, and I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this matter should not be left where it is. I submit with deference that circumstances have arisen which make it appropriate that this should go before the standing committee on debates for inquiry as to the procedure which has taken place and what actually did take place in this instance. Perhaps the Speaker could inform us whether *Hansard* had already refused to make the changes when requested by the Minister of Agriculture. If it did we should know that, because in that case it was no minor alteration but an alteration which *Hansard* had already refused to make when it was requested by the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker: May I deal with the point raised by the Leader of the Opposition. In line with the conversation I had with the editor of debates during the last recess he did refuse to alter the words and that is why he submitted the matter to me. That is why the Minister of Agriculture came to my office to see me. I communicated with the editor of debates this morning again and I said: "In your opinion was it such a material change in view of the fact that figures were involved and the house was in committee of supply?" He did tell me that he did not think it was such a considerable change but in the light of the conversation we had during the recess it was the type of change which he felt he should refer to me.

As I told hon. members before, I would not have dealt with this matter in any shape or form had it not been for the fact that I thought it was merely a minor essential alteration and having regard to the fact that the house was in committee of supply, the accuracy of figures was under consideration and, as I say, I was impressed by the circumstances that there was an inference there about institutions being guilty of something which had been indicated in the house.

The Leader of the Opposition will permit me to tell him and the house that so far as the editors of debates are concerned they are not responsible for one second for anything that has happened. As a matter of fact, I pay them a tribute for their integrity, their independence, their conscientiousness and their impartiality. I will say further that if there is one man who is responsible for this it is not the Minister of Agriculture but the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, yes, I am.

Mr. Knowles: Under pressure.

Mr. Speaker: Oh well, pressure—it all depends what you mean by pressure. The Minister of Agriculture did not insist that I do it—

An hon. Member: Oh, no?

Mr. Speaker:—but the circumstances were such as I explained a moment ago. Hon. members know that between five and six o'clock I had as my guests two parliamentarians from New Zealand and it happened that several members were in my office while they were there. They were just about to take their leave when the minister came in. As a matter of fact, I thought he was coming in to meet the two parliamentarians in question and I was very pleased to introduce him to them. But in the course of the conversation, and it was just a few minutes before six o'clock, I took it that the editor upstairs had perhaps been overzealous and was questioning the fact that the minister wanted to alter some figures for purposes of accuracy.

I take the responsibility and I am prepared to stand before the house. I will say, having reviewed the matter again during the week end, that I realized, as I said, that if I had had a few hours to look into the matter I would not have dealt with it in the manner in which I did. I confess I made a mistake and I do apologize to the house. In order to put the thing straight I suggest that the words be reinserted just as if nothing had happened, and I am prepared to submit myself to a vote of the house.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a procedure, and I have already quoted what is the recognized authority for a similar procedure. In the first place may I, with deference, suggest to Your Honour that the Minister of Agriculture must accept full responsibility for having initiated the proceedings which led to this unfortunate result. One of the things that must be recognized is that when we discuss procedure here and seek appropriate changes it is not a reflection on the Speaker which should call for any suggestion that he submit himself to the house. It is a suggestion in regard to statements which have already been put forward and which, in the minds of many hon. members, do not suggest a satisfactory procedure.

In the quotations that Your Honour made I submit there was appropriate emphasis placed on rules that should be observed. One is that there cannot be a change unless it is shown that the reporter misunderstood the hon. member who was speaking. No such situation occurred here. Another rule is that an hon. member cannot make changes in the