

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 31, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

[English]

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE OF SUBJECT OF QUESTIONS ON STATEMENTS MADE OUTSIDE HOUSE—RETRACTION OF CERTAIN WORDS BY MEMBER FOR GANDER-TWILLINGATE

**Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, I rise with your permission and that of the House to deal with a point of order which has been before the House for the last two days in respect of matters that arose during the question period the day before yesterday when the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) made certain comments.

I have read with very great care what you had to say and what other hon. members had to say, including the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), the government House leader and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). In particular, I listened to Your Honour with interest when you indicated there is a collateral problem to the main issue which might invite the attention and consideration of the committee of this House best qualified to deal with such matters, that is, the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. Since then there have been some consultations among House leaders which have proceeded reasonably well, as such meetings do, and I think we are at least in agreement that there is a problem relating to statements made outside the House by members of the House touching on proceedings in the House, and the opportunities and means by which such statements may be the subject of comment and discussion and may be dealt with in the House.

Your Honour has ruled on many occasions that the age old accommodation and principle of privilege does not apply. I think I must agree, perhaps without prejudice, that Your Honour is quite right in the strict interpretation of that principle. However, because of the introduction of electronic media and because many statements are frequently made outside the House immediately following what has been said in the House, I think we can all accept the fact that a very real problem has been created. I do not pretend to say what the answer is, but I say there ought to be an answer.

In light of that and the fact I have had discussions with the other House leaders, I would propose, and with the hope that the House might feel disposed to accept it, that Your Honour might put to the Committee on Procedure and Organization as accepted by the House something along these lines, and I offer this as a guide:

That the question of statements by members outside the House with regard to proceedings inside the House, and the manner and extent to which such statements can be dealt with or be the

subject of comment and consideration by members in the House, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization.

I only say that I drew this in the widest possible terms in the hope that the Committee on Procedure and Organization, which is now engaged in dealing with questions of procedure and the Standing Orders of the House, might be seized of this matter and, hopefully, might deal with it and bring in some recommendation.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to confirm the statement by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) to the effect that there have been consultations among us in respect of this matter. I should also like to indicate that we are in agreement with regard to the proposition that the question of comments in the House on statements made outside the House be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization.

I should like to make it clear, indeed, to use words I am accused of using too often, I want to make it crystal clear that this is all we are talking about in so far as reference is being made to a recent occurrence in the House. We are not in this context making any reference to the use of unparliamentary language. That is not what we want referred to the standing committee but rather the clearcut question of whether the rule is now out of date which denies to members in the House the right to make reference in questions to statements made outside the House by ministers of the Crown.

I would point out, Sir, that this problem arises not only in the way you indicated a few days ago, namely, in relation to weekend speeches which seem to provide material for Monday afternoon questions, but it also arises during the week. There are occasions when a member puts a question to a minister and gets a certain answer, if he is lucky, on the floor of the House, and then the minister goes outside the chamber to room 130-S, goes on radio and television and says things he did not say here on the floor of the House.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** A revised version.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** But because these statements are made outside the House the member, under the rule, is precluded from asking questions about them. I am not trying to solve the problem here but I believe it should be looked at. I think it becomes a bit of a farce for us to have to go through the formula, every time we want to ask a question about a minister's statement, of asking the Prime Minister whether that minister was stating government policy. It seems to me, for the reasons given by the hon. member for Peace River, particularly the electronic age in which we are living, that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization should look into this matter.