

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 14, 1970

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. CROUSE—MINISTERS' OFFICES IN CONSTITUENCIES

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which affects the rights and privileges of every member of this House, and I raise this matter at the earliest possible moment. My question of privilege relates to a return tabled in the Commons yesterday for the Conservative member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates).

The information given in the Commons return states that 11 of 13 ministers have offices in federal buildings but the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) rents an office at \$7,360 a year in his Montreal Mount Royal riding, and the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) rents an office in Montreal Maisonneuve at \$1,675 a year. The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) and the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) pay their one-man staffs in their ridings, Toronto Rosedale and Port Arthur respectively, up to \$10,000 annually out of the public treasury. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) is the only minister with a two-member staff in his riding, Medicine Hat. Each is paid up to \$5,000 annually.

The Prime Minister's and the Secretary of State's constituency staffers each receive \$7,500 annually at the maximum. Other ministers with constituency offices and the maximum publicly paid salaries for their staffers are as follows: The Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), Kingston, \$7,500; the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene), Niagara Falls, \$7,500; the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Côté), Longueuil, \$7,500; the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey), Verdun, \$7,500; the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford), Vancouver Centre, \$5,000; the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), Drummondville, \$5,000; the Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans), Montreal Duvernay, \$7,500; and the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. MacEachen), the only Nova Scotian, no publicly paid staff.

An hon. Member: There is the economy drive.

Mr. Crouse: Mr. Speaker, in view of the economy drive and in view of these facts as tabled in the Commons I therefore move:

That the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections consider whether members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada holding offices as Ministers of the Crown have violated the provisions of the Senate and House of Commons Act respecting the independence of Parliament by accepting allowances and profits out of public moneys to purposes not authorized by vote of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has given the Chair the notice required under the Standing Order, which has given me the opportunity to give some thought to the point raised by the hon. member. As he and other hon. members know, this is not the first time this kind of situation has been brought to the attention of the House. It has been considered by Speakers before me.

The question that has to be decided at the present time is not whether there is a grievance, whether there should be a debate on this matter or whether it should be considered by the House or by a committee at some time, but whether there is a question of privilege. I had the opportunity yesterday of considering in some detail what was the nature of parliamentary privilege. I indicated what I felt was meant by parliamentary privilege and breach of parliamentary privilege.

• (2:10 p.m.)

I doubt very much that the privileges of any individual member are affected in the circumstances outlined by the hon. member. I have little hesitation in reaching the conclusion there is no question of privilege which should be studied by the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

The hon. member suggests in his statement or proposed motion that there has been a contravention of the Senate and House of Commons Act. Whether this is correct or not, to my way of thinking this is a point of law rather than a question of privilege. If the hon. member questions the propriety or impropriety of a minister's action, this again, as I pointed out yesterday, can be brought to the attention of the House or discussed by the