

MR. RAE—LETTER CIRCULATED BY ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, earlier today I gave you notice and sent you a copy of a letter which, in the view of our party, raises a prima facie case of privilege on which I would like you to rule. In the event that you do so find that there is a prima facie case, I would then move a motion that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Some time last week the provincial office of the New Democratic Party in Manitoba received a photocopy of a letter under the signature of a Mr. D. H. Beattie, manager of consumer and commercial banking services for the Royal Bank of Canada. This letter was drawn to my attention. I have spoken with Mr. Beattie and he confirms that this is in fact an authentic copy of a letter which he sent out. It bears the date February 22, 1980, and is addressed to the managers of all Winnipeg branches. It concerns members of Parliament.

With your permission, Madam Speaker, I would like to read the letter into the record.

Last year, we, along with the other banks, were asked to provide information concerning close contacts which members of the banking industry had with members of Parliament. As a result of the February 18 election, the Canadian Bankers' Association is updating their information and have again solicited our support.

Accordingly, we should appreciate hearing whether you or, where applicable the assistant managers have any business or personal contact with the two newly elected federal members of Parliament for Manitoba, Messrs. Cyril Keeper and Laverne Lewycky.

In your reply, it would be appreciated if you could elaborate on the extent of the relationship, if any. In the event the manager of one of the other chartered banks in your area, in your opinion, has a better or closer relationship with the member involved, please so indicate. If you know where the MP in your area conducts his banking, this information would also be helpful.

A reply by March 10, 1980, is requested, if you have any information regarding these new members.

Yours truly,
D. H. Beattie
Manager
Consumer/Commercial Banking
Services

Earlier today I took the opportunity of giving copies of this letter to the House leaders of the other parties and I gave them notice of my intention to raise this as a matter of privilege. I do not intend to make a lengthy representation but I would just point out one or two things.

First of all, the categories of contempt or of privilege are not closed. While I have been unable to find a precedent in either Erskine May or Beauchesne which would make a prima facie case of privilege, I wish to quote from page 136 of May's where it reads:

● (1540)

It may be stated generally that any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

I would point out that under the provisions of the Bank Act—the one still in force, not the one which is yet to be

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born—section 68(2) which deals with the statutory rights of the Inspector General of Banks reads:

The inspector or any other person appointed or employed under section 64 or any person to whom any powers are delegated under subsection 65(4) shall not disclose to any other person, except the minister, the Deputy Minister of Finance or the governor of the Bank of Canada, or a representative of the latter if authorized by him in writing, any information regarding the business or affairs of a bank.

It would seem that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections would like to hear from the writer of this letter and indeed the Canadian Bankers' Association, which is apparently compiling information on members of Parliament. They would like to hear precisely what information they are compiling. Why do they need to know, for example, in which area or in which bank a member conducts his banking, and precisely what information on the financial relationships between a member of Parliament and his bank are now going to be subject to the lobbying activities of the Canadian Bankers' Association and its member organizations, fed into the computers and who knows where it will go?

It is obvious that systematic information on members of Parliament is being compiled. I do not think it is an exaggeration or an exaggerated extrapolation from this letter to question the extent of these lobbying activities and the way in which systematic information is being gathered, particularly at a time when matters of such importance to the people of Canada as well as to the banks of Canada are being discussed in this House.

Madam Speaker will know that our chartered banks have a long history of lobbying in this city. The Canadian Bankers' Association is a very old organization. It has been heavily involved in the lobbying behind each and every decennial review of the Bank Act. Indeed, at one time many observers thought it was the bankers themselves who were writing the legislation and not the members of Parliament.

Whether that be the case or not, I respectfully submit this does raise a prima facie case of privilege and, if you so find, Madam Speaker, I would then move:

That the subject matter of this letter and indeed the lobbying activities of the Canadian Bankers' Association and their compiling of information on members of Parliament be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Bill Kempling (Burlington): Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member. To my knowledge, and I will have to defer to the record, when we were going through the Bank Act I do not believe anyone from the NDP attended any of the meetings. There were members of the Canadian Bankers' Association sitting in the audience. I do not know whether they were monitoring what was being said, but certainly any information they took down was available in the public record that was kept of those meetings. They certainly were not included in any of the meetings that were held in camera.

As far as the members of the banks gathering information on members of Parliament is concerned, I am sure anything they took down there was readily available in the public record and other records of information on members. In fact, if