

*Privilege—Mr. Stevens*

bers of the House of Commons. By the way, the comments I am making now are completely non-partisan. They are designed simply to illustrate the nature of the problem.

I have myself been involved in the past with various reports on broadcasting when members of the opposition found themselves incensed at each other because some had been more favoured than others by a particular group which was reporting. Similarly, in the case of royal commission reports which, I suggest, are somewhat analogous to the Auditor General's report in the sense that there is no secrecy provision, some of them, resulted in members on the government side being upset because the opposition was in possession of more information than they had themselves.

As a result of this development there has evolved over the years the concept of a lock-up so that in the first instance the media could be assured—and this was the beginning of it on non-secret matters—that deadlines or release times would be respected. If the hon. member, and any other, wish to look up the antecedents of this they will find I am correct. It was always difficult to determine how all the media could be treated fairly.

The second development, one which has come about in comparatively recent times—as I suspect the distinguished member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) would agree—was a genuine move on the part of government to ensure that the opposition had the opportunity of advance knowledge so that there could hopefully be some form of informed comment. This was unheard of, I think it would probably be generally agreed, until recent times. In other words, the government prevented the kind of problem which is now occurring simply by saying "You will hear about it when it comes up in the House." So the move to greater consultation, toward getting everybody in a position where the debate can be substantive and worth-while, has resulted in the kind of problems before us today.

But I do want to emphasize once again that as distinct from the budget or other matters where fiscal or monetary policy is involved and with regard to which, as the hon. member has said, special considerations apply, most of these other things have to do with ensuring that everybody—the media, and subsequently members of parliament—gets off on the same footing.

● (1532)

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not the consideration of this matter in the context of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections or some other committee of parliament, is the appropriate forum. I am quite certain that my colleague, the government House Leader, would have no objection to having some of the matters raised there, but I suspect that it would be useful if there were perhaps a consultation between House leaders in the first instance so that all of these issues would be embraced in the same consideration, rather than those which are exclusively under the purview of parliament, and therefore of you, sir, as the distinguished head of parliament.

[Mr. Jamieson.]

Since television has come into the House it has given still another dimension to this particular problem. It was evident in the budget debate of a few nights ago when, as I understand it, in the absence of any signed commitment, but of what may be described as a gentleman's agreement, there was an understanding that comment would not precede the actual points in the speech which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) was making. Therefore, there were certain understood time constraints. For one reason or another these were not, from my personal observation, adhered to. I do not say that this was done deliberately. To see what was occurring, I chose to watch the budget debate on television rather than from my seat in the House.

The hon. member for York-Simcoe, the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), and many members of the media, who probably triggered the response of opposition critic, were in their comments ahead of what was being said here in the House. I would suspect that almost any one of us is sufficiently egotistical not to want to be upstaged in this fashion, even if perhaps there is no particular financial concern with regard to the stock market or anything of that sort.

I wanted to put my views on the record, Mr. Speaker. I think that the movement toward more consultation and providing more information for the opposition and other spokesmen, is a move in the right direction. I would hope that any decisions which are made would not be designed to constrain that in any way.

On the specific point I do want to make it clear, lest there is any shadow of a doubt about it—and I do not think that the hon. member was seeking to do so—that this, I believe, was a rule of the Auditor General himself and was not something which the House leader or indeed the Secretary of the Treasury Board, who might normally be expected to do so, had imposed upon him. I think that this was the Auditor General's own rule and, therefore, I do not believe that there is any cause for a grievance in so far as any action by the government itself is concerned.

**Mr. Speaker:** There are several members who may want to contribute to this discussion, but I would like to leave it for a time because it seems to me that the hon. member has raised a point which might have a serious procedural difficulty in that since he, or any other member, does not have to go to the lock-up at all, it is difficult to tie it to a question of privilege, thereby establishing that somehow the member is prevented from doing something by the condition laid down surrounding a particular event when, in fact, the hon. member obviously does not have to go there at all if he does not want to do so.

I have not had a chance to think that through, but in terms of founding a question of privilege on the basis of the member being prevented from carrying out his duties in the House, it seems to me that that has always been tied to the duties, or aspects of parliamentary duties, which are absolutely essential to any member, and has to amount to the prevention of a member in his essential obligations—not in those obligations which may be, although closely tied, not tied or related in some way to his essential obligations. I am not making a final