

Privilege—Mr. Cullen

has offended, and that is that you do not question the motives of other members. The hon. member suggested that he, because of the alleged previous performance of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), had every reason to believe that the minister was a tough guy and so forth, and therefore he said those things. That is an example of questioning motives. Instead of examining what was said or not said, or its rightness or wrongness, the hon. member proceeded to try to impugn both the motives and the trustworthiness of the minister.

Unfortunately, recently we saw in Canada, through the polls, a popular referendum taken in which the public was asked in effect, "In matters of security, who would you sooner trust, the politicians or the police?" and the answer came back overwhelmingly, "We would sooner trust the police". I can understand this, and I suggest that unfounded allegations of untrustworthiness, and proceeding on assumptions that the motives and the trustworthiness of politicians should always be questioned, lead to a general public unwillingness to trust politicians, who themselves say they should not be trusted.

I suggest that the House should not follow or adopt rules or procedures which advertise or advocate untrustworthiness on the part of its members.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Before I hear the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) on a separate point of order I would like to deal with this matter.

The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) has raised, by way of a question of privilege, that which has been raised frequently in the past by way of questions of privilege, particularly in circumstances relating to incorrect quotations by the media which in fact turn into questions or points of some sort which have been raised in the House.

We have always in the past, in circumstances of this sort where there have been incorrect quotations which were perhaps misleading to the public on very important matters but which further have become matters of issue of some sort in the House, allowed, under the heading of privilege, opportunities for matters to be exposed to the House and for comments to be made by other parties perhaps affected. That does not, however, in any way alter the question, which is not a question of privilege under the circumstances, and therefore I feel it should not be considered as a priori a question of privilege, but ought to be finalized at this time.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order which relates to comments made by the hon. member for Westmount (Mr. Drury) and by the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggan (Mr. Hnatyshyn). I am very much concerned about the course of events this afternoon related to the question of privilege raised by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen).

[Mr. Drury.]

● (1542)

In dealing with this matter Your Honour has referred to the fact that this was not just a question of the recollection of the minister, I assume, on the occasion of last Saturday. The minister quoted extensively, both by way of introduction and by way of exchange in terms of the specific events later referred to in the press story. There has been a long-standing tradition in this House that when documents are quoted from, as different from when they are referred to—

Mr. MacDonald (Rosedale): Official documents.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): No, any document. I am sorry that the former minister of finance (Mr. MacDonald) and one-time House leader does not recall. We have had a series of experiences, and my recollection is clear over the last 12 years that from time to time when ministers referred to documents and then quoted from them, that quotation was sufficient to require the tabling of that whole document. On occasion we have had some fairly stormy sessions about this, but the Chair has always upheld the principle that documents quoted from are subsequently tabled in this House. If this were not to be the case ministers who quote from documents would have a special advantage in dealing with the nature of the documents in the course of debate.

We are in a situation where the minister is not simply relying on his memory—I am sure he agrees with this, and I will give him a chance to clarify it if I am wrong—but he is obviously quoting from a transcript of the actual events as they took place. At this point the transcript is only available to the minister. To my mind it is a strange situation. If the minister is—and I believe he is—honestly attempting to clear the air on this matter, because I am sure he does not want to be identified with the comments as they were carried in the press last week, he would make the total document available. I assume that he has reviewed the total document to make sure there is no other comment made that would contradict what he said on the question of privilege this afternoon.

To be fair to the House, however, and more important to be consistent with the traditions of the House, Your Honour has referred to the fact that we are in a somewhat different situation. Normally when ministers refer to documents and quote from them in order to clear up a misunderstanding, or in this case a question of privilege, there is no question but that the documents are subsequently tabled.

In this case we are dealing with a document, in effect a transcript that the minister has made available to himself so that he can clarify the record. He quotes from the document specifically but selectively. What members are asking for here is, I think, reasonable and is consistent with the traditions of this House—that the transcript which is the basis on which the minister made his statement this afternoon should be tabled in this House. Only in that way can we be in conformity with the traditions of the House as well as satisfactorily clear the air, which is the minister's prime objective in this instance.