

*Privilege—Mr. Baldwin*

what specious grounds that it might face an action? Is the fact that, even in that event, it would face no loss, a consideration for this House and the committee in deciding the extent of the pressure which was obviously brought by the minister through his communication, by his admission, to those newspapers? Is it significant that all the other newspapers in this country except the ones in Saskatoon and Regina published that article about which the minister complains so vehemently?

Aside from the fact that there is nothing in that article other than what every member of parliament may from time to time have to put up with, I do not think there is a solicitor in this House who, even looking at it at first blush, would ever consider it libellous and slanderous. Does that make a difference in the case of a minister of the Crown? Hon. members might ask why I single out a minister of the Crown. What has happened to the publishing and news dissemination industry in this country is that great newspapers and publishing houses in Canada own radio stations and television stations, all of which are licensed by the CRTC, which is not a creature of this parliament but a creature of the government. Therefore, in those circumstances I think it weighs very heavily upon the back of any minister of the Crown, who is in a different position in that sense than anyone else to approach a newspaper.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, come on!

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** I read the article in question and I did not find, quite frankly, anything to justify the letter or to justify the hurt the minister apparently felt.

**Some hon. Members:** Who are you?

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Apparently I am one who is not nearly as sensitive as this minister.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** The minister appeared on television last night and said he was very concerned about this article because it might discourage others from going into public life. That is not what discourages others from going into public life; it is the hypocrisy of some ministers of the Crown.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** I think it is a very important consideration for this House to examine the depth of impact of a threat to sue by a minister of the Crown who is much different from anyone on the street.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** When that threat is made to an organization which has interests in other publishing and information dispensing fields which are subject to the jurisdiction of a board or commission which is answerable to the government of Canada, that makes the threat a much deeper one. This is not a case of a thin-skinned minister who could not stand the heat and decided to write a letter. This is a case of

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton.)

limiting the publication to one area, flying in the face of an indemnity to indicate the influence, at least on a prima facie basis, that was brought to bear upon that publication by a minister of the Crown—not Otto Lang, barrister and solicitor, but the Minister of Transport: as the article says, the only one who wanted to be Minister of Finance. That is the impact. That is the point in this matter, that the minister has a responsibility not to attempt to suppress any information anywhere in this country as a result of his position.

● (1530)

I should like to see tabled the legal opinion, dated the day it was given, that the article was defamatory, with the authorities upon which the solicitor relied. The facts of the matter are that a number of other publications in this country were not intimidated by this minister, and if there was an examination, as I am sure there was, by the solicitors for those other newspapers which dared to publish in face of the threat by the minister, then I would think not all of the solicitors would be out of step but the solicitors for F.P. Publications.

I do not know whether a case will be made out before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. We are not here to decide that; we are here to decide whether there is a prima facie case.

**An hon. Member:** You have made up your mind.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** You bet I have made up my mind. The committee on privileges and elections should decide whether it ought to examine the matter further. I think the case reeks of that prima facie quality and the matter should go to the committee where it could be dealt with fully.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak for only a few minutes, and I hope what I have to say may help to clear the air a bit and get us to the point that is really before the House.

The first thing I should like to say is that I deplore the way in which cabinet ministers, almost every time a serious issue of this kind is raised, draw out the old argument that the hon. member raising the matter ought to put his seat on the line.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Nowhere in the Standing Orders, nowhere in the rules, nowhere in the precedents, is there a requirement that that be done. In a few cases in our history it has been done voluntarily by the member making the attack or making the charge, but there is no requirement that any time a member of the House raises an issue he should put his seat on the line.

The second thing I should like to say is that I fully support the right of any member of this House, whether a private member or minister of the Crown, to take whatever action he feels necessary under the law if he feels he has been libelled or slandered. There is no question about that. It is not so long ago that a former minister of finance, Mr. John Turner, took action against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for