

Privilege

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Shortly thereafter in a news broadcast the network displayed the document and made public certain details indicating that it was in fact a printed document entitled *The Budget in Brief* which was part of the Budget package scheduled to be presented to this House today at five o'clock.

An Hon. Member: Where was it printed, Mike?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): The premature release of details of the Budget appears to have resulted from a breach of trust, a wilful criminal act against which there can be no certain security.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): We have asked the RCMP to investigate to determine how this occurred and who was responsible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): I am advised by my officials that this violation did not result from negligence, carelessness or lack of proper security arrangements for the Budget documents. The Budget documents are produced under tight security in my Department.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): When ready for printing, they are conveyed to the Government printing plant and proofs returned to the Department under equally tight security. The printed documents themselves are stored in a secure area—

An Hon. Member: How secure?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): —and when shipped, are accompanied by security personnel.

There are two essential considerations underlying budgetary secrecy: The need to ensure that a person does not profit or otherwise gain advantage from advance knowledge of the content of the Budget, and the principle that the Government's financial policy should be disclosed to the House of Commons before it is made known to others. In the present circumstances in which the Budget has been the subject of an unauthorized disclosure, the Government approached the opposition Parties in this House to ask for their co-operation in approaching the Chair to seek a special sitting of the House last evening in order that I might have presented my Budget before the House immediately. Unfortunately, the Opposition Parties did not see their way to

co-operate in seeking a special sitting of the House of Commons.

• (1120)

Mr. Langdon: Point of order.

Some Hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mindful of the importance of not permitting any individual from profiting or gaining other advantage from advance knowledge of the content of the Budget—

Mr. Tobin: Why didn't you come at six o'clock when you knew?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): —accordingly, the Government concluded that the prudent course of action was to make the Budget public immediately, and that was the course of action followed last evening.

Before doing so, I transmitted copies of the Budget documents to Your Honour through the Clerk of the House and to the Leaders of the Opposition Parties. I understand that the Clerk has received these documents and has caused them to be distributed in the normal way.

I regret that this course of action was necessary—

Mr. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Then resign.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): —since it denied the right of Hon. Members to hear the Budget presented in the House before it was released elsewhere. Under the circumstances I believe it was the most appropriate course of action.

In reaching this decision the Government sought the advice of constitutional experts inside and outside of Government. There was a consensus that the course of action chosen was the only sensible one to take having regard for the principles underlying the tradition of Budget secrecy.

Ms. Coppins: What about parliamentary experts? They will tell you to resign.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): I view this matter with the utmost seriousness. That is why I have taken the earliest possible moment to make this explanation to the House. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak not only to the Minister's question of privilege but to my own, and I believe on behalf of all Canadians whose privileges have been breached by the negligence of the Minister.