

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, January 27, 1949

The house met at three o'clock.

PRIVILEGE

PRESS REPORT OF REMARKS OF MEMBER FOR
VANCOUVER CENTRE

Mr. James Sinclair (Vancouver North): Mr. Speaker, at this opening moment of the first business day of parliament I rise on a question of privilege affecting the good name and the honour of every member of this house except one. On the front page of the Vancouver *News-Herald* of July 26, 1948, appeared the following headline:

C.C.F.'er classes M.P.'s as "bunch of crooks".

The article reads as follows:

The Canadian people have been sending "a bunch of crooks" to parliament, Rodney Young, C.C.F. member for Vancouver Centre, told a C.C.F. open forum here Sunday. "And I will not take that statement back," he added.

Commenting on the "anti-labour" and "reactionary" attitude of Liberal and Progressive Conservative members of the Commons, Mr. Young said in a report on the last session, "I am burned up by the nonsense some of these people utter. The workers would be unholy mad if they knew what was going on in parliament."

The Canadian people were coming to believe they must send men of the producing classes, not lawyers, to parliament. The government had been "stunned" by the election of three C.C.F. members in recent by-elections.

Mr. Young, who spoke five times in five days while at Ottawa, assured his friends that he would "really go after those guys" at the next session.

I was amazed that any member should make such a statement, especially a member who had been here only ten days. I thought it another case of a loose tongue outrunning good judgment, and expected a retraction the following day, or at least the usual weak defence that he had been misquoted or misunderstood. When no such retraction appeared, as the member for the adjacent riding I felt it my duty, in fairness to my colleagues in the House of Commons, to follow up the matter. I went to the *News-Herald* and asked the editor whether, while it was still fresh in his mind, I might speak to the reporter who had covered the meeting. The reporter gave me this statement:

I had already written the story of the meeting before I went there, basing it on a prepared report by Denny Kristiansen, C.C.F. publicity man. When I got there, I found that Young spoke mostly on other things, so I had to write another story of the

meeting and refer to the former one as an "inter-view." I find in my notes that he said the people had "been hiring a bunch of crooks in parliament." Writing the report, my mind was not sure about the word "hiring," so I made it "sending," but did not put it in quotation marks. He added that he would not take it back. If he were in the House of Commons, he said, it would be ruled out of order as unparliamentary, but he could use the expression there at the meeting and he would stand by it.

However, I found that I had no need to get such a statement, because the three Vancouver papers immediately took exception to the statement and defended our good name. This provoked the member for Vancouver Centre (Mr. Young) to the writing of a letter to the *News-Herald* in which he repeated this charge and added other charges. I now wish to refer to that letter. The heading in the newspaper is as follows:

"A bunch of crooks"—M.P.'s called loafers, too.

I quote the first two paragraphs of the letter:

In view of the editorial appearing in the August 3 issue of the *News-Herald* I should be greatly obliged if you extend me the courtesy of publishing my reply.

Speaking at a public meeting on the evening of Sunday, July 25, I made the following statements—

Here is an interesting thing. Nine days after he made an ad lib speech he is able to explain in detail exactly what he said. I will not read the exact words, but he calls us incompetent, lazy and flagrantly neglectful of our duties. Further on in the letter he repeats his charge about crooks, in these words:

"I have said that I regard certain members of parliament as 'crooks'; I do not consider this term too harsh; I will not be afraid to use the language of the people. You can rely on me; I shall get after those 'guys' good and plenty, when I get back to the next session."

Then the letter goes on:

The news item in your journal stressed my use of the term "crook." Since it was a news item and not a commentary, I had no quarrel with the reporter, who was doing a job. The editorial was a statement of opinion in which you deprecated my general attitude and terminology. I do not agree with you on these points, and will have no hesitation in facing my fellow members at the next session of parliament should some of them feel that the cap fits.

In public life, Mr. Speaker, all of us are accustomed to slanderous attacks from crackpots, made in ignorance, and from communists with the intention of trying to break down our parliamentary institution. We generally ignore these statements. When such