

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 3, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

## THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

USE OF MACE CRAFTED AFTER FIRE OF 1916

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to calling orders of the day, may I make the traditional announcement to the House that, in recognition of the seventieth anniversary of the fire which destroyed the Centre Block on this day in 1916, I would draw to the attention of Hon. Members the wooden replica of the mace on the Clerk's table. This mace was used for many years as a replacement for the original one destroyed by fire.

Prior to calling and reading of the order, I am in receipt, properly, of a request from the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) to raise a question of privilege. The Deputy Prime Minister.

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

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## PRIVILEGE

POSITION OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

**Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, as you know, the proceedings last Friday terminated early. Over the weekend I had the opportunity of reflecting on the "blues" and this being the first opportunity that is available to me, I would like to say a few things that concern the various questions that have been raised in the House on matters which transpired almost a quarter of a century ago, here, in these buildings of Parliament.

As I indicated to Members on Thursday of last week, the substance of the article in that day's *Star* has been a matter of public record at least since 1976 when in his book, Peter Stursberg, quoted substantially from the interview I gave him in 1973.

**Mr. Deans:** This is a statement.

**Mr. Nielsen:** The full transcript and tape of that interview have been public since January 1, 1981.

Members will also be aware that in an article in *Saturday Night* in January of last year, statements similar to those made over a decade ago appeared. It is true that as a matter of happenstance I was able—

**Mr. Prud'homme:** Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. With respect, the Deputy Prime Minister can hear what is beginning. I think he knows that I have been attempting in the past to be quite strict about requiring that the question of privilege which is raised be presented in its procedural form early in an argument with regard to questions of privilege.

**Mr. Nielsen:** It is true that as a matter of happenstance I was able as an opposition private Member to know what was said at meetings of the Liberal caucus. I say "happenstance" in that I did not initiate that opportunity. This took place during an intensely partisan period of parliamentary life during which Members on all sides were pursuing their responsibilities with a zeal that history will undoubtedly judge to have been excessively partisan and deeply regrettable. I have neither concealed nor denied the existence of this state of affairs. No one regrets more than I that events in this House of the past few days have likened themselves to the Parliament of the sixties. None of us who were in Parliament at that time, myself included—

**Mr. Althouse:** That is not a question of privilege.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I say, with great respect to the Deputy Prime Minister, that I think he is making a statement that is of deep and sincere importance to him, but I must ask him to come to the question of privilege, with respect.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I am in the middle of it now, or, coming very rapidly to it.

None of us who were in Parliament at that time, myself included, is proud of the excesses of that period. Indeed, I do not condone any invasion of a private Member's private conversation or caucus discussion, and Members are well aware of my views with respect to the Official Secrets Act and national security.

**Ms. Copps:** Order.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I offer these words because of my respect for Parliament. Hindsight and the passage of time have taught me that excesses of a quarter century ago ought not to be praised or repeated a quarter century later.

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** Mr. Speaker, while the events of which I speak are long past, I apologize to those who believe that proprieties were violated 25 years ago by my conduct.

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