

Privilege—Mr. Sharp

infrequently. As a matter of fact, it happened in one case when Liberal members were brought to a committee on the pretext that they were trying to seduce certain members of parliament to join our party.

I say, in conclusion, that if I rose to participate in the debate, it was because I am a House of Commons man. I think the House of Commons is the greatest guarantee we have that democracy, as we understand it, will function, because we debate here in front of the press. Some people may not like the press. I happen to respect it and consider it an extension of the House of Commons. We have a chance to debate here. This is a debating chamber, and when we go beyond the law we have an opportunity to take back what we say. I have taken advantage of that. I have stood in my place, apologized and said I had been caught unawares or spoke in the heat of the moment and went beyond what I had meant to do. I have risen in my place because I had to apologize for a leak of documents in my department.

It is one of our fundamental rules that the word of an hon. gentleman is accepted without question. However, I have become a little uneasy in the 15 years I have been here. I think the rules of the game are important to this whole matter, not just to the hon. member. I often sit here uneasy because I sat here through the sixties. We have a tremendous privilege. We have immunity from the normal laws of slander, libel, smear and innuendo which the man on the street does not have. This is the kind of thing which is precious and which should not be abused. I remember in the sixties—and I am not talking about ministers—innocent, junior people in certain ministerial offices, like Guy Lord, whose career as a lawyer was completely destroyed. Never once was he accused of anything; there were simply questions as to whether Guy Lord knew this or that. As a young rookie, I rose and said, "Supposing the events two months from now prove that he was completely innocent of the inferences in those questions: how do we make up for or redress that grave injustice?" That man's career was ruined and was never recovered. Events proved that he was completely, utterly innocent of any wrongdoing.

When the hon. gentleman who likes to lecture now and then, and who seems to be getting crabbiest as old age sets in—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: —says he is just a little tired of our suggesting that people put their seats at stake, we are getting a little tired of the lectures of the hon. gentleman as though he had replaced Beauséjour around here. Well, he has not done so yet. I hope that may come in his retirement years, in the late 1980s, but the hon. gentleman should address himself to the point I am making.

How many times in the question period do questions become facts in the minds of newspaper people who may not have been present, but who get their news third or fourth hand, or in the mind of the man on the street who unintentionally transfers the questions into statements of fact? When an honest question is asked about the conduct of a minister or a backbencher, or about the integrity of a member of parliament or his actions, we all know this quite often becomes translated into fact through the gossip mill of this country. People's careers can be ruined in the

[Mr. Mackasey.]

question period if questions are not framed with a degree of responsibility.

● (1410)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: Simply because the sense of responsibility permeates and dominates the House of Commons we, the recipients of the questions, are given the opportunity to say, when we think hon. members have gone too far, "Look, that is an accusation, a reflection on my integrity, on my character, on my name, on my family and on my future. If you have any facts, put up or shut up."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: Because this is a civilized chamber in which there are civilized people, members usually stand up, swallow their pride and apologize. No one has ever been thought in this House less of for making a mistake and admitting it. The hon. gentleman opposite, who had all last evening to reflect, should remember that my seatmate, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) has been exonerated. The media of this country apologized to him. Mr. Justice Mackay exonerated him.

Mr. Nielsen: Not quite.

Mr. Mackasey: Perhaps the hon. gentleman opposite is used to abusing the House of Commons because of his great knowledge of the rules. Perhaps the hon. member for Yukon has lost his respect for this chamber.

Mr. Nielsen: Certainly not.

Mr. Mackasey: I have not.

Mr. Andre: You are wasting the Créditistes' time. Come to the point.

Mr. Mackasey: The hon. gentleman talks about wasting time. Why did he not go back to Alberta? He is there, anyway, 40 days out of 50.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, my point is this: Mr. Justice Mackay did not find it difficult to apologize to my seatmate, the hon. member from Shawinigan. The Chief Justice did not in any way minimize or limit the complete exoneration of that minister. The responsible newspaper which broke the story apologized, which was a courtesy because this matter was not raised in an editorial; it was a news story and they wrote it in good faith. Everybody has apologized except the hon. gentleman who last night raised certain questions. By implication, they point to ministers, and the suggestion is that they committed an illegal act, even though Chief Justice Deschênes said otherwise.

Mr. Nielsen: No, he did not.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): He did not judge them at all.

Mr. Mackasey: If hon. gentlemen opposite want to play around with the law, I ask them this: What was Mr. Justice Mackay's motivation in writing the letter of apology?