

Privilege—Mr. Rae

though, it has not been tabled and it is not available. I am supposed to make a decision based on whatever information I have. The public has a right to see this document, too, in order to determine its attitude on the measure to be debated today and in ensuing days. I feel its absence is a direct infringement on my privileges. In fact, it is an impediment to my work when I am denied access to a document which the government admits is in existence and has agreed to table. It has certainly not been tabled in time for an important debate.

I would point out, also, that it would be too late next Wednesday to raise a grievance at that stage, as has been suggested, because by then the debate might well be over. This document should have been available to me and to the public generally.

● (1440)

I suggest that this is a genuine question of privilege, and if Your Honour rules it a question of privilege, then I would like to move a motion referring it to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member raises the additional point that the House is being asked—that is to say, all members—to participate in a debate on a matter relating to mortgages, interest rates and their deductibility. The hon. member seeks a report which he says was ordered by the House pursuant to previous motions for the production of documents, that that document is not forthcoming and therefore not in the possession of members, and that that puts a nature on it which I would think, if not privilege, is certainly a very serious matter.

I do not know if there is anyone representing the minister in this matter at the moment, but I will certainly take the matter under advisement and hope that all action would be taken which would comply with that order if at all possible before the House is asked to proceed with that particular debate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MR. RAE—THE BUDGET—ALLEGED MANIPULATION OF TIME TO DEBATE

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I gave you notice of a question of privilege, and that was not done lightly. It concerns the manipulation of parliamentary time.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hees: My old riding would be ashamed of you.

Mr. Rae: The hon. member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees) says his old riding would be ashamed of me. I do not think that is the view people there will take when they hear what I have to say.

My question of privilege concerns the time allocated for the debate on the budget statement on Tuesday night. I want to quote from Erskine May at page 785 as follows:

The consideration of the financial statement for the year made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the most important business of ways and means.

[Mr. Herbert.]

It is precisely because it is the most important business of ways and means that I, speaking as the finance critic for my party, resent most deeply the way in which parliamentary debate on the budget has been manipulated by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker). That is to say, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie) is allowed on Tuesday night at 8 p.m. to tell the House of Commons what his budget is going to be, with all the focus of public attention which is derived therefrom. The spokesman for the official opposition is given an opportunity on Tuesday night to reply to the statement of the Minister of Finance. We were told in yesterday's debate by the President of the Privy Council as recorded in *Hansard* at page 2077 that he cannot even tell us precisely what day after that time will be allocated for the discussion of the budget. The best he can tell us is that it will possibly be—or to use his words, it “will likely be”—on Friday, December 14.

Since the categories of privilege are not closed, I think a case can be made that the government has so manipulated Parliament's time in the consideration of the budget that it is guaranteeing that the same public attention will not be available to those in my party and on this side of the House who are concerned about making constructive criticism of the budget presented by the Minister of Finance.

In any other statement made by a minister—this will be a financial statement by a minister on ways and means, and there was an example yesterday of a statement made by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Hnatyshyn)—time is allotted in such a way that official spokesmen for all the parties are able to make statements at the same time and not have those statements subject to the manipulation by the government of parliamentary time. I think it is—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member will realize that it has been a long standing practice of this House that on budget night, regardless of the duration of the speech made by the Minister of Finance in delivering the budget address, the second intervention is that of the financial critic for the official opposition who, before he concludes, adjourns the debate.

That has been a customary practice. Even if it were not, the hon. member would realize that he is asking at one and the same time, first, for a ruling on something which has not yet happened and, second, for a ruling on a practice of the House which, as long as I have been here, has been the practice in the delivery of any budget speech for this to take place, which means that the intervention by a third party in the discussion on budget night has never taken place.

The hon. member may wish to see if he can pursue the situation. He may wish to raise it, as he has done, by way of a grievance; but surely since it has been part of our practice for at least 10 to 15 years—and I assume for much longer than that—I am not able to regard it, even on a preliminary basis, as a question of privilege.

Mr. Rae: Mr. Speaker, the question I am raising is a question of the consecutiveness of the debate. I am not asking Your Honour to carry out a revolution in procedure. I am