

Hansard—Altering of Report

It cannot be done by any member of the house on his own initiative, as was done in this case. What is more, Mr. Speaker, I submit in deference that it cannot be done by the Speaker except under the authority of the house. It can only be done by the authority of this House of Commons, which is the supreme authority in matters of this kind.

There are plenty of precedents in regard to this. On April 7, 1933, the then member for Temiscouata, whom most of us remember very well, objected to a certain word used by a member about him in debate, and Mr. Speaker said at page 3804 of revised *Hansard*:

If the hon. member for Temiscouata believes that the word referred to him, I will direct that it be expunged from *Hansard*.

I would like to point out what happened on that occasion.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. member be good enough to give me the date of the incident?

Mr. Drew: April 7, 1933. The then leader of the opposition, Right Hon. Mackenzie King, made the following statement, which appears at page 3805 of *Hansard* I just referred to, and I quote his words:

Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to take exception to what Your Honour may have done in the way of expunging possible objectionable phrases from *Hansard*, but I would ask if it is not part of the privilege of the house to control its own records, and whether the house should not, before any statements are expunged from the records, pass a resolution in the first instance. I raise this point now because Your Honour has made decisions which equally affect members on both sides of the house. I did not wish to take exception to anything done in the past but I respectfully submit so far as the privileges of the house are concerned that His Honour the Speaker is the servant of the house in this as in all matters, and the house should itself determine whether anything is to be expunged from any of its records.

That was the statement of Mr. Mackenzie King, the leader of the opposition at that time. The Speaker then made this reply, as reported immediately afterwards on the page of *Hansard* I have referred to:

I will take the remarks of the right honourable gentleman under consideration.

Then, having given the matter the appropriate consideration, Mr. Speaker Black, on April 10, gave his ruling as follows, as reported at page 3855 of *Hansard*. I submit that this has stood unchallenged as the appropriate statement in regard to matters of this kind. I quote:

On Friday, April 7, the right hon. the leader of the opposition raised the point that the house having control of its own records, the house should, before any statements are expunged from the official report of the debates, pass a resolution to that

[Mr. Drew.]

effect, and he submitted that the Speaker being the servant of the house in this, as in all matters, the house itself should determine whether anything is to be deleted from any of its records.

In the case in point, the first opportunity I had of fully understanding the words complained of was when I saw the official report, and since I should have ruled them out when they were uttered I consider I was justified in ruling them out from the chair as soon as the house sat again. I agree that in dealing with *Hansard* the Speaker's authority is subject to the approval of the house.

Instructions for any alteration in the official report of the debates should not be given without communicating them to the house in session, and for this reason, whenever I have deemed it advisable to direct that certain statements be expunged, I have done so from the chair, thus giving a ruling which, under standing order 12, is subject to an appeal to the house.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the situation here is one in which the minister could have apologized to the house, as he should have done.

Mr. Gardiner: I am quite prepared to do that when you sit down.

Mr. Drew: At least, Mr. Speaker, we have a grain of encouragement to say that the debate has brought this conviction to the mind of the Minister of Agriculture, and we welcome it. But it goes much farther than that. This subject is not one where figures or quotations were in doubt. This is not a case of a minor change. This is a case of tearing *Hansard* apart. This is a case of changing the whole context after that part of the debate, and in relation to statements which could have been corrected at a subsequent time by the proper procedure.

Now, if it were possible for *Hansard* to be changed in this way its effectiveness would be completely destroyed. No matter what we may argue as to the degree of official authority that is to be interpreted as applying to these records, the fact remains that they are described as the official report of debates and they are the only official reports we have. The whole context must remain in its proper form if we are in fact to have an understanding of what took place.

It must be remembered that in the proper course of their duties many hon. members may not be present in the house on a particular day. It is not only the members of the government who have legitimate reasons for being out of the house on many occasions. As every hon. member knows, many committees sit while the house is sitting and members are outside of the house. Unless the record conforms to the meaning and intent of the debate itself, hon. members who were doing their proper business as members of the house on committees or otherwise are denied the opportunity of knowing what took place here.