

Interpretation of Debate by Newspaper

hoped-for day of accurate news reporting is farther away. That affects the political fabric of the nation and for that reason is of great concern to members of this House. If Your Honour rules that this is a proper question of privilege, I intend to move that, as the Press Gallery is an integral part of the operation of a democracy and of this House, the matter of the growing threat to freedom of the press as posed by the continued extension of the Thomson newspaper chain in Canada be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Okanagan Boundary has given notice of his intention to raise the question of privilege he has just outlined. As hon. members well know, the responsibility of the Chair at this stage is to determine, as a procedural point, whether there is a prima facie case of privilege. Precedents also indicate that the Chair has to determine whether the matter has been raised at the first opportunity.

The point made by the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary has reference to interpretative reporting of Parliament in the Thompson chain of newspapers. The hon. member proposes to move the following motion:

That the matter of the growing threat to freedom of the press as posed by the continued extension of the Thomson newspaper chain in Canada be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

The question to be resolved by the Chair at this stage is whether the situation complained of by the hon. member constitutes a prima facie case of privilege. Parliamentary privilege has been defined in many instances. I remind hon. members once again of Sir Erskine May's definition of parliamentary privilege as—

—the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. Thus privilege, though part of the law of the land, is to a certain extent an exemption from the ordinary law.

Does the situation complained of by the hon. member constitute an interference with members of the House, either collectively or individually, in the discharge of their functions as members of the House? The answer, in my view, must be in the negative.

What the hon. member seeks is an inquiry by the Standing Committee on Privileges and

[Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary).]

Elections into an alleged threat to the freedom of the press. If such a far-reaching question were to be investigated by the House it seems to me that the proposal should come to hon. members by way of a substantive motion rather than by way of a question of privilege. May I refer hon. members to citation 113 of Beauchesne's fourth edition. As an example of a breach of parliamentary privilege the author states the following:

Libels upon members and aspersions upon them in relation to Parliament and interference of any kind with their official duties, are breaches of the privileges of the members.

Farther on, Beauchesne states that an attack in a newspaper article is not a breach of privilege unless it comes within the definition of privileges given above. The suggestion is that a newspaper article cannot be questioned by way of breach of privilege unless its contents are tantamount to libel and constitute an interference with their official duties. I repeat that I cannot find these essential elements of breach of parliamentary privilege in the circumstances alluded to by the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary and I must conclude that his motion cannot be put at this time.

[Translation]

MR. CAOUCETTE—CORRECTION OF STATEMENT IN THE HOUSE

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege in order to set the record straight concerning a statement I made in the House last May 4. According to certain information I have received since then, I believe I may have misled the House as regards summer employment for students. Indeed, I made the following statement:

In my region, for example, the mining companies hire local students during the summer months. The Noranda mine, for one, had between 1,000 and 1,200 students on the payroll last year, but this year they have decided to hire only some 200.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my correction is as follows: Whereas the government's recommendation is that private industry hire students in a ratio of about 5 per cent of its current active manpower, I must admit that, according to the information provided by Mr. Bérubé, the manager of Noranda Mines, this particular company goes further than the government's suggestion since it hires a number of students which equals 17.6 per cent of its labour force, that is, three times as much as the government standards.