

Privilege—Mr. Nystrom

breach of the privilege of the House, then of course it is a decision Your Honour will have to make.

I can assure hon. members of the House that this initiative was taken by the government in the best faith and in the best interests of improving grain handling and transportation facilities in this country. It is a responsibility which I have. It is something to which I give top priority. The House was not in session at that particular time, and there were no committees established. If there had been a parliamentary committee in existence at that time, perhaps the parliamentary committee may have considered this important factor. Certainly there was nothing untoward, political or partisan about the appointment of this task force. It was in the best interests of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mazankowski: It was in the best interests of improving the grain handling and transportation system in this country. I put that to Your Honour in the most sincere and genuine fashion that I possibly can.

Mr. Ed Lumley (Stormont-Dundas): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), mainly because I heartily agree with everything he said. On November 23 I raised this question with the House leader.

I do not doubt for a second the sincerity of the hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) in initiating a study of this kind, because of the importance of the grain transportation or rail line abandonment study which he initiated with another hon. member. But I think he has missed the point. The point in fact is that hon. members on all sides of the House were not involved in that particular study where government funds were involved. As the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville stated, it infringes upon the rights and privileges of each and every individual member of this House.

Yesterday the minister said that the committee was formed when the House was not sitting. Well, we have an office of the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau); we have a deputy House leader and a whip. All it would have taken was a telephone call to ask if members of this particular party, the NDP or the Social Credit were interested. Because of the national interest of the two studies, in particular the report of the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta), I am sure any number of members of Parliament would have been interested in co-operating with the government. One cannot compare this particular study to the Booze-Allan report which was an outside study commissioned by the Government of Canada.

There is another element which has been missed so far. When government expenditures are used to pay for trips by hon. members, we should have equal opportunity. As members of Parliament, we have ten trips a year for travel anywhere in Canada. As the hon. Minister of Transport knows from his days as transport critic, it is very difficult to be able to maximize the use of those ten trips in doing things in the interests of transportation. Yet hon. members opposite were offered a special opportunity to travel to various areas in

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

Western Canada to meet with interested parties who were not available to members on this side.

Another point is that members of the task force were invited to discuss at the federal-provincial ministers' level this report to get the input of provincial ministers of transportation and agriculture. That privilege was not offered to members on the opposition side of the House.

It is worth reading into the record the answer of the House leader to my question on November 23. With respect to the so-called parliamentary task force which included only Conservative members of Parliament, while acknowledging the dedicated effort of the individual members concerned, I asked the following:

—would the President of the Privy Council assure the House that in future parliamentary task forces will include members from both sides of the House—

As reported in *Hansard*, the President of the Privy Council and Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Baker) said the following:

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy the hon. member raised that question. It has been my view—and I know it is the view shared by the Prime Minister—that for too long the talent which exists on the benches on all sides of the House of Commons really has been underutilized. We adopted as an experiment the procedure to which the hon. member refers.

It is too bad he did not consider opposition members at the time this thought process took place.

Mr. Lefebvre: It is just an oversight.

Mr. Lumley: He continued:

I have no objection whatsoever to considering that kind of task force involving all members of the House of Commons. There are many issues which could be considered respecting the operation of government that really are not partisan and that could engage properly the attention of members on all sides of the House of Commons. I certainly agree with the representation contained in the question.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker will rule in favour of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville on his question of privilege. Perhaps even before Your Honour makes your ruling, the House leader of the government party will make a firm commitment to the House that never again will there be a parliamentary committee which only involves members of the government party.

Mr. Speaker: I see quite a number of members seeking the floor. I should like to ask their co-operation in making sure that they are adding something to the debate which I have not already heard.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to welcome most warmly your suggestion that we not engage any further in references to the matter being of a partisan nature. In other words, we should not contend that the matter is partisan, and the government should not worry about defending that position.

By the same token, I suggest that it is completely irrelevant to argue about something in the report being good. Whether it is helpful or not to the situation is irrelevant to the basic issue,