

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

spending of the government. He is misleading the House right now.

An hon. Member: Withdraw.

Miss Bégin: The \$6 million or something—

An hon. Member: It is \$6.2 million.

Miss Bégin: The \$6.2 million, as my colleague in the opposition pretends to know, for a so-called children's immunization program is not within federal jurisdiction. That has never been cut because it has never existed in the first place. It falls clearly within provincial jurisdiction. That is the first accusation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Bégin: As to the second one, I suppose the member is aware of the health problems of Indians; I hope he visits them in his own riding. He should know that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and myself are moving at a pace which pleases us to have Indians take over health administration at the pace for which each community is prepared and make new requests according to the requests they are making to us.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. McGRATH—GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, yesterday arising out of questions directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), I reserved, on a point of order, my right to raise a question of privilege. Since that time we have heard, by way of the public media, from the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), who is responsible for government propaganda or communications. Also we have had replies in the House today.

I raise this as a question of privilege because I believe the practice the government has begun is an affront to the notion of open and free debate, which is basic to the theory of privilege in a parliamentary system. The inside front cover of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice* has a thematic quote which reads:

When you have convinced thinking men that it is right, and humane men that it is just, you will gain your cause. Men lose half of what is gained by violence. What is gained by argument is gained forever.

In the formative years of Parliament the threat of violence was the most obvious impediment to parliamentary debate. The privilege sections of Erskine May are full of references to acts of intimidation which were specifically forbidden so that rational debate, free of physical fear, free of issues of personality, could proceed. Privilege does not exist to prohibit violence. It exists to guarantee the conditions necessary for productive debate. We would be misreading privilege if we applied the specific precedents and forgot their purpose.

Just as our constitution did not foresee all the jurisdictional disputes of today, the law of privilege could not foresee all the conditions under which debate could be throttled. If we recall the purpose of parliamentary privilege I do not think we can ignore what is now taking place. In essence, the public has been compelled to pay for advertising which supports the partisan position of one political party, albeit the government political party. The purpose of such advertising can only be to inhibit the opposition in its attempt to debate government policy or the assumptions on which it is based.

This Parliament has passed a law about partisan advertising and the public purse. Under the Election Expenses Act parties are able to collect money and contributors receive refunds. The Liberal party has used its executive position unilaterally to help itself to additional funds. Unfortunately there are no refunds for the taxpayers here. As has been pointed out in the House, we as a party have advertised against the proposal to de-index personal income taxes. We use money properly collected and accounted for as political contributions under the Election Expenses Act. In the referendum campaign in Quebec, both sides had public funds placed at their disposal.

The Minister of State for Multiculturalism seems to understand perfectly the division between acceptable and unacceptable advertising. Last night he said to a CBC reporter:

The content of the ads should reflect either a policy that has been approved at least in principle in Parliament or widely reflect the views of all sides of the House of Commons.

The proposal before the House has not been approved in any way as yet, either in principle or in any other way. There are sharp differences emerging in the debate between the parties.

A continuation or escalation of this practice would seriously challenge our democratic system of open, unprejudiced debate. Ads paid for by the executive are merely the modern equivalent of the corruption and intimidation which contaminated the House of Commons at an earlier stage of its development. I believe this view was supported by the opinion of Madam Speaker's distinguished and illustrious predecessor, Mr. Speaker Jerome. As reported in *Hansard* at page 2180 of the last session, when government task forces were challenged by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), Mr. Speaker said:

The support of public funds, where applied to parliamentary activities, ought, I think, to apply across the floor of Parliament—

That principle equally applies here. If the public is to be informed at public expense, it should be informed on both sides of the question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: The practice now gaining in use is a dangerous one to the cause of fair debate. I think the present ad campaigns and the problem generally should be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

My argument was supported today by statements made in the House by the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, the minister in charge of government communications, when he