

Privilege

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister tells us he is ready to debate the bill.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): So what!

Mr. Gauthier: So what! We have before us a question of privilege, a question of contempt of the House. I think it has precedence over the minister's disposition to debate a bill. We are ready, too, to debate any bill he brings forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1200)

Mr. Lewis: It is always nice to know when you have struck a nerve, Mr. Speaker. I cannot help but notice that that brought my friend to his feet. I regret the delay just as he does and his members who want to debate this very important bill on the ministry of forestry act. I appreciate that as Whip he has brought his members back and they are now cooling their heels.

I cannot help but in opening my remarks refer to the fact that my hon. colleague, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition, made liberal reference to Mr. Diefenbaker. There is one other quote that he should remember. Mr. Diefenbaker said: "When you are hunting bear you shouldn't be distracted by the rabbit tracks". I think what we are seeing here today is two parties distracted by the rabbit tracks, because the essence of the GST debate should be handled elsewhere.

I think it is fair to say that the replacement of the present federal sales tax with the goods and services tax is a fundamental change in the way sales taxes are applied in Canada. We appreciate that. We felt it was our job and our responsibility as a government to see that all individual Canadians, whether they are employers or employees, understand the changes that we are proposing.

When one places ads one always wants to know that they are being read. I appreciate the publicity that my hon. colleagues have given this issue by referring to the ads that were placed across Canada. We are pleased that they have had that impact on the Canadian people and on my colleagues in opposition.

Reading the text of the ads has never been a great strength of my colleagues opposite. So if I may, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out one thing. I do not want to read the entire ad. I could go on to say that it is a major program to reduce the deficit. I could say that it will strengthen our international competitiveness, but

what I would like to focus on are the words "proposed changes".

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate the comments of my hon. friend and I listened with interest. I just want to bring to his attention that it says in the headlines that the federal sales tax system "will" change. There is no proposed. There is no maybe. There is no likely. It is "will". It is very clear.

Mr. Lewis: My hon. friend only reads the left side of any newspaper. This is on the right side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: If the Minister would read the article or text we are talking about, I may remind him that Citation 83 of Beauchesne's, Fifth Edition, reads as follows:

Should a question of privilege be based on published material, the article in question must be submitted and read at the Table.

It makes no difference to us whether the Minister wants to read the right side or the left side of the ad. If he doesn't want to read it, he should ask the clerk to do it for him. We read the ad, and we say it is unparliamentary and undemocratic.

[*English*]

Mr. Lewis: While my hon. friend was out rounding up his critics on the forestry act, his leader made liberal reference to the advertisement in question. I was just picking a point out that perhaps my hon. friend had missed.

I think that what we have here is an effort by the government to inform Canadians about proposed changes. It has resulted in a great number of calls from interested Canadians, many of whom I understand are supportive of the act and the suggestion. We have had a flood of requests for overview documents and technical papers, and I know that right now the department is anticipating another flood of requests for information as a result of the fact that this has been raised by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

There is a bit of a contradiction here. My hon. friend says on the one hand: "You should not distribute material, you should not advertise it is available for distribution", and at the same time members of the committee last week were calling for further debate and further hearings. You cannot have it both ways. He either wants full and open hearings with full and open