

Privilege—Hon. M. Lambert

The hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) has raised this by way of a question of privilege. Indeed, it is a matter that deeply affects the right of all members to access to the building. They have made representations as to the proper use of the building, and I think this is a very proper subject to be taken up in this way.

The House will know that on Monday some hon. members made representations to me. When I wrote the hon. member for (Grenville-Carleton) I was writing to all four House leaders. I was doing so for two reasons. First of all, the press on Monday morning had raised this problem and, secondly, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) had in fact come into my office to speak to me about it, so I was well apprised of the difficulties we were facing and, as well, very much aware of the concerns expressed by hon. members.

I called in the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Langlois), who is the social convener from the House of Commons side of this convention for the Liberal party, and after a discussion I wrote that letter to the House leaders.

That does not tell the whole story. On reflection, going back to the beginning of these arrangements, I was asked, following the necessary step, that I make some of the premises available in the House for an event in connection with this convention. I have my notes here, and on checking back on a request for an examination of precedents in respect of the use of the building in this respect I found, and I may be over-simplifying it, that in principle, as I think the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) attempted to put it, there were precedents which would support this kind of use of the building.

Certainly on a numerical basis, the formula for inviting a number of guests for each member or Senator would lead to something that could be held along these lines. The difficulty, of course, is that if this were done all at the same time it would so over-tax the ordinary facilities of the building that some special arrangements would have to be made. I only say this to indicate that I did examine the precedents to see whether functions of this sort, or of some sort, had been held in connection with meetings of this kind.

I also re-examined my own precedents that I had outlined to the House some time ago in the way of a statement regarding the proper use of this building because, indeed, as I have said in the past, the building should be used to bring Canadians into contact with their members of parliament in this setting. Sometimes that is done purely for parliamentary purposes, and sometimes for a combination of parliamentary and social purposes. Therefore, in keeping with that, it seemed in principle it would be appropriate to hold some event.

In fairness, I think what has happened is not that the nature of the event was in any way misrepresented to me, but probably, since the giving of permission and the state arrangements have reached at the present time, the proportions of the event have grown tremendously, at least in the understanding of the people who were engaged in the original conversation.

At this point there are two questions. In principle, is there something untoward about the use of these buildings for this

[Mr. Speaker.]

sort of event, and, even in principle, if there is not something untoward, has this matter in this particular instance grown to such a dimension it raises problems that were not anticipated at the time of the giving of permission?

If the House will permit me to do so, I should like to pursue the matter with the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) as he has suggested, and following our conversation I would pursue it with other House leaders, as has also been suggested, to see whether the matter can be resolved in that way.

If it cannot be resolved in that way, then I assume all the hon. members who seek to make an intervention this afternoon that, before finalizing my decision on the motion of the hon. member for Edmonton West, I will certainly come back to the House and give them an opportunity to make such intervention, and that includes, of course, the independent member who was not represented in the party discussions this afternoon.

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you mentioned in your comments a moment ago, I am one of the members who was seeking your recognition on this issue on the basis of the fact that I provided you with notice of my intention to raise this as a question of privilege. I appreciate and accept your comment that you are prepared to bring this forward at another time to allow members to contribute further and express their concerns. My concern, Sir, is that I shall be absent from this House on parliamentary business from February 9 to February 13 inclusive. In light of that, I find it very difficult to accept your ruling. Because I am highly indignant about the entire affair I regret having lost the opportunity to express that indignation and the indignation I feel my constituents inevitably will feel.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. If the hon. member for Kootenay West insists, he certainly can express his indignation right now.

Mr. Brisco: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker I will be as brief as possible. I am not going to deal in legal terms or parliamentary references, like those used by experienced members such as a former Speaker, the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), and our House leader. I would ask you, Sir, as the First Commoner, how you or any member in fact feels he would be received with reference to this proposal if an approach were made to Canadians on the street today? If you were to ask people in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Montreal or Halifax about this matter, what do you think the response would be?

● (1552)

Rarely have I felt as indignant, astounded, and hurt by the responses from the insensitive hon. members on the government side of the House as I have today. These hon. members are not treating this matter seriously.

I had the opportunity of standing in the Hall of Honour and watching Her Majesty the Queen enter the parliament build-