

Question of Privilege

Mr. Nugent: Mr. Speaker, I think the interjection made by the Minister of Transport is a classical example of the deep-seated trouble that the committee should look into. The minister asked, is this not over yet? Therefore it is obvious that the question of the privileges of the house could not matter less to him. It is a bore and a nuisance.

The question of responsible government and the question of the rights of committees which I raised earlier are, of course, treated in the same way. That is one of the reasons I have suggested as a defence for this young man Pepin who has written this article—and in fairness I think I should bring it up again—that perhaps one of the strongest reasons for him being so careless with the truth is the example that has been set him in this house.

Perhaps one of the reasons that there is such a low standard of reporting in the press gallery, and an apparent failure to deal honestly and factually, is that its members see so much of the hiding of facts by this government. Because recent events in the house have shown such a contemptible regard for standards of conduct in the house we should consider seriously whether we have led this young man astray, and I suggest that the Minister of Transport should face that question very seriously because he revealed exactly that attitude when he asked, have we not finished with this yet. Whether or not we have become too cynical, Mr. Speaker, and whether there exist those factors I have brought forward as excusing a member of the press gallery being confused, such as the Minister of National Defence having been so successful in clouding the issue here, I still feel this matter should be looked into.

I suggest that the question of the informant is one we want to go into, for the explanation to be given by this reporter to the committee might cast a good deal of light on the manner in which news is gathered in our press gallery. I also suggest that the question of the responsibility of members of the press gallery to make themselves responsible for their own sources of information is involved. The committee should also consider whether or not the editor who allowed this article to be published, and the publisher, should be questioned as to the duties and the responsibilities of editors to see that articles are factual and have some degree of fairness in them, and certainly to see that they do not go out of their way to bring about discord by introducing questions of religion and race in this country.

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

Therefore I hope that by supporting the motion members of the house will indicate that they have some regard for responsibility as well as freedom, and that they are concerned that matters such as this should be dealt with honestly. I am not asking hon. members to say that reporters have to be 100 per cent accurate but reports should be honest, and on that basis I ask the house to support my motion.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, since the hon. gentleman, while defending his own privileges, has chosen to cast personal aspersions on my conduct, I would just like to say that I was mildly objecting to the procedures of parliament being treated in the way that they are being treated now.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I want to say only one or two words on why I for one do not propose to support this motion. If we in this group thought there was any serious reflection on the hon. member or any other hon. member, we would be very glad and, indeed, anxious to support him because it would be a serious question, but frankly we cannot believe that this allegation is too serious. After all, some of us would be delighted if an admiral would make signals to us from the gallery, a form of distinction that few of us have ever had.

I must say that when the hon. member first raised the question of alleged tampering with a witness before the defence committee we took the matter very seriously and were anxious that it be looked into, but at this stage we think it would be a waste of the time of the committee on privileges and elections to refer this matter to it. We think no worse of the hon. member because of the article in the press. Some of us have previously seen articles in the press which were not, shall we say, kind to us, but we do not think the unkindness on this occasion is of the nature that should take up the time of the house or that of any committee of the house.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I have only a few words to say, because this motion is debatable and because the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot (Mr. Ricard) said a while ago that I claimed an anti-French Canadian issue was being made out of the matter. Now, I am not the one who claims that. Those are allegations heard here and there in the province of Quebec.