

Privilege

• (1110)

Last night at 5.30, Global Television informed the office of the Minister of Finance, his officials, that they had the contents of the Budget and read out the details of the Budget at 5.30. At 5.55 the House Leader for the Government and the Deputy Prime Minister came into the Chamber and asked that the sitting of the House of Commons be extended. I contend that the Government and the Minister of Finance knew at 5.30 that there had been a leak of his Budget. That was the time for the Minister of Finance to have been on the floor.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Riis: We are seeing parliamentary practices breached, parliamentary traditions breached, 500 years of tradition breached. The honourable thing for the Minister of Finance to have done, at the first and earliest opportunity which was before six o'clock yesterday, was to come into the House of Commons and indicate at that point to the House that a breach of security had occurred, and that he was not going to present the Budget the next day as per the Standing Order. He would have done that as an honourable and respected member of the Crown. That is what ought to have happened. That is why I contend that this request by the Minister of Finance for a point of privilege is out of order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I have heard the Hon. Member. It is certainly true that a question of privilege should be raised as soon as it is reasonably possible. I point out that we have a number of questions of privilege raised, and I have them here, at different times. I do not feel under the circumstances that it would be appropriate to cut off the Minister of Finance, and I recognize him.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of personal privilege.

Mr. Speaker: I will hear the Hon. Member for Ottawa Vanier (Mr. Gauthier).

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, we are rewriting the rules of this House at this time. A motion that another Member be heard is always in order by all traditions at any time.

An Hon. Member: Challenging the Speaker.

Mr. Gauthier: I am not talking to the Speaker. I am reminding this House that we are rewriting the book, and I disagree with that.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Challenging the Speaker. Shame.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of personal privilege. I want to take the earliest opportunity to explain to this House the extraordinary events that occurred last night.

An Hon. Member: Sit down.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Shortly before supper-time yesterday—

Ms. Copps: Resign.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—employees of Global Television informed officials of my Department that an anonymous telephone caller had read to one of their staff—

An Hon. Member: What time?

Mr. Speaker: I would like to advise all Hon. Members that we may be in for quite a long debate today. Hon. Members will note that I said debate. I think that debate requires the right of all Hon. Members who wish to contribute to be heard by other Hon. Members. The Hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, shortly before supertime yesterday employees of Global Television informed officials of my Department—

Some Hon. Members: What time?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—that an anonymous telephone caller had read to one of their staff members information that purported to be part of the Budget.

Some Hon. Members: What time?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Shortly thereafter in a news broadcast the network displayed that document and made public certain details indicating—

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker is fully aware that the issue that we are addressing at the moment is a very important one, both historically and in the conventions of Parliament. There is another convention of Parliament, that the Hon. Member who is an experienced Member of Parliament also understands, that there is free speech in this House. That means that a person should be listened to when they have the floor. The Hon. Minister of Finance.