

Privilege—Mr. Thacker

[English]

I do not have to remind you, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to read, for the purposes of enlightening some of our colleagues in this House, new ones perhaps, what privilege is all about, because the question was put yesterday.

Some Hon. Members: Dispense!

Mr. Gauthier: No, I will not dispense. It is a very important point. The front bench of the Government takes it frivolously, but we on this side take this very seriously.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, allow me to read Beauchesne's Fifth Edition Citation 16:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. Thus, privilege, though part of the law of the land, is to a certain extent an exemption from the ordinary law.

I go on quoting because this part is important.

The distinctive mark of a privilege is its ancillary character. The privileges of Parliament are rights which are "absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers". They are enjoyed by individual Members, because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its Members.

Mr. Speaker, when a Member cannot come to the House of Commons because he simply cannot hear the bell—and we had an example of that today at the Wellington Building where the bell failed to ring—is that a breach of his privileges? I say it is.

If the same Member experiences difficulties because there is no adequate, rapid and efficient transportation from the Wellington Building or the Confederation Building, Mr. Speaker, again I say that the Member has a question of privilege and that, in such instance, his rights might be curtailed if he were to find it impossible to get here on time to vote or debate an issue.

Mr. Speaker, I think that a committee might be asked to consider the whole question of Parliament Hill and the means of transportation provided there.

[English]

Members should be sure that they can arrive at the House when they want and in time to discharge the duties for which they were elected. The question raised yesterday by the Hon. Member for Lethbridge (Mr. Thacker) indeed prevented him from arriving in time to

exercise the right of a Member; that is he heard the bells ringing when he got into the Confederation Building, he took a bus, and he told us in his remarks yesterday, he was unable to be here because of the traffic tie-up.

Members are elected to participate in debate, to participate in committees and to vote in this House, and they should be allowed to be here whenever they have to be here and whenever they want to be here. That is my point. There are several buildings in these precincts which are not connected by tunnels. At times we have to use buses. These buses sometimes have certain difficulties.

Hon. Members will remember that many times in the last Parliament we had to ask the Speaker to hold the vote because we knew certain Members were unable to come here in due time to exercise their democratic right to vote. The Speaker has given us this understanding.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the point raised yesterday is interesting because we now have a building with the offices of 23 Members of Parliament, the Wellington Building, which has no transportation facilities available at this time. Buses are not at the disposal of the Members. They have to cross Wellington Street and come to the bus stop which is on the property of the Parliament of Canada. Therefore, those Members should be entitled to come here whenever they please, whenever they have to and whenever they want to exercise their rights as Members of Parliament.

• (1300)

I thoroughly endorse and support the proposition that this whole question be sent to a committee for study, consideration and that action be taken thereon.

Mr. Speaker: Before adjourning the House, has the appropriate motion been made?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened to the Hon. Member for Lethbridge (Mr. Thacker), the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) and I am completely in agreement that the House ought to entertain the appropriate motion.

An Hon. Member: So moved.

Mr. Speaker: So moved. I should also say that the Sergeant-at-Arms has made arrangements with the RCMP starting this afternoon for police assistance in clearing traffic and that that matter, including the matter of the bells, ought properly go to committee.