

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

Mr. Speaker, I could easily blame the Government for not having consulted families. But my purpose is to prove clearly that this Government is in breach of privilege.

First, this is no accidental but intentional in my view. To begin with, the Minister of Finance announced that on June 18, there would be a reading at 8 p.m. on tax reform.

Second, he informed—that decision was planned—that on June 18, at noon, reporters and representatives of each Party would be locked up. And this is where there has been a serious breach of privilege—and it is your role, Mr. Speaker, to uphold the rights of all Members, not only Opposition Members but Progressive Conservative members as well—at the same time, this Government, this same Minister of Finance summoned 20 people for privileged information, not to be consulted but to hear privileged information, and that was on June 17. He went through that trouble, everything was planned, it is not an accident or an error.

Everything was planned, it was done on purpose to infringe upon Member's privilege. And the Minister of Finance, in answer to questions today, never denied that that was his plan, his scenario.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I could easily have blamed workers, senior citizens, the absence or the lack of these people there. And the Minister of Finance answered questions and said it was not a budget, it was a paper and it was not urgent. But what was it? That answer proves again that the Minister is wrong. If there was no urgency, why select 20 people, 20 accounting firms selected from across the country, and have them meet beforehand? If the Minister wanted to be fair, he could have waited until next week until Friday, to meet all businesses, all accountants, tax experts, to brief them, in order to correctly inform the public.

I do hope that the Chair will protect the privileges of the House. We could accept excuses and understand that, overwhelmed by his great many responsibilities, the Minister could have made a mistake. This time, however, this is clearly a decision not only of the Minister of Finance, but also of the Cabinet on such an important issue.

This may have serious consequences. Let us assume that you are the customer of an accounting firm and you discover suddenly that it has no privileged connection with the government, contrary to the firm next door which had an opportunity to secure privileged information from the government even before the other ministers and ordinary government members and opposition leaders. Under these circumstances, it is clear that you are going to turn to the other accounting firm to get more benefits and opportunities. The Minister has certainly goofed. If the Prime Minister chose this strategy, he goofed too. But the real issue here, Mr. Speaker, is about the privileges of the House.

Today, a ruling is necessary to protect all Hon. Members, because if this planning strategy is accepted today, I feel Hon. Members will become irrelevant, for there would be no point fighting for a seat and asking people to lect them as their

representatives, because 20 tax specialists in the country would enjoy advantages accountable Parliamentarians would not have.

Mr. Speaker, I rely very much on your ruling to protect the privileges of the House.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I will come to the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) in a moment. The Hon. Minister.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a comment on a point of order. I understand that I am not allowed to make any further comments on the question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: May I correct the Hon. Minister. I did not suggest that the Minister could not make another point on the question of privilege if it was important in respect of anything which has been said in argument. I would not close off the Minister. I will certainly hear the Minister.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, the point of order I want to make is pursuant to something which I said in my remarks and something which the Hon. Member for Carleton—Charlotte (Mr. McCain) said.

The Hon. Member has drawn a distinction between an accounting firm, one of whose members is part of this group, and another accounting firm, one of whose members is not part of this group.

It gets right to the heart of the point I was making, when people draw politically advantageous conclusions or try to make political points on something like this at the expense of the integrity of the people involved in the process. What the Hon. Member is implying is that the accounting firm, whose member is involved in this process, is allowed some inside information and is using that inside information for the benefit of that accounting firm's clients and to the disadvantage of the people in the other firm.

If that is the case, the Hon. Member is saying that the accounting firm, whose employee or partner is part of this, is breaching the oath of secrecy, and that is quite contrary to what the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition said.

I ask the Hon. Member to withdraw that because it is an entirely wrong conclusion to draw and it undermines the total process we are trying to use here of drawing good people into the process so that we can have proper consultations in advance and avoid mistakes of the past.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair may not have taken quite the same point as have others in the Chamber. I thought we had clearly established that there was no suggestion by anybody—and I must say that I am not sure I got that suggestion from the Hon. Member from Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart)—that any one of the 20 persons who took an oath of secrecy has breached that oath of secrecy.