

practice of ministers making statements on major changes in government policy.

That practice changed, Mr. Speaker, and we have a hint of why it changed in the government House leader's remarks on this point. The change came about with the change of government in 1968. The reason the government House leader puts forward for it—and it is perfectly accurate—is that if a minister makes a statement on motions, then the right arises for the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leaders of the other parties in the House to reply. However, Mr. Speaker, this became burdensome in terms of time, in the view of the government, and therefore the government says, "If we are going to save this time, we will simply deny the opposition parties the opportunity of reply by not making statements".

The government House leader knows this was a long-standing practice hitherto which had become deeply embedded in our procedures, hon. members opposite who were members in the past know that this was the practice that was followed. As I say, it was discontinued because, (a) they did not want the opposition fire in reply to government statements, and (b) they wanted, in their view, to save time, and in our view to deny us the time to make replies. The privilege here is based on long-standing practice, and it is this which is being breached.

The statement is of as much interest to me as a member of parliament as it is to the member who raised this question. We are being denied the right to reply to a statement regarding a major change in government policy. That is, in my view, the privilege which is being breached, and that privilege is founded on long-standing practice, even though there is no mandatory obligation in our rules requiring the minister to make statements in the House. I agree with the government House leader on that point.

● (1530)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my submission is that, notwithstanding the absence in our rules of a mandatory obligation to make such statements in the House, it has been such a long-standing practice that it has become the right of members of this House to have ministers make statements of this nature in the House. Therein lies the breach of privilege in this case.

**Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe):** In order to save time, Mr. Speaker, I will make just a few short comments. I was closely involved in this matter with the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), and I am beginning to wonder what we are doing here. We have been asking questions for 11 months, to which we have been receiving the answer that there is an important task force review which is to be tabled. This has been promised time and time again. We have been told it is going to be tabled soon, but instead we have the minister making announcements piecemeal about what the task force is recommending.

**An hon. Member:** Outside the House.

**Mr. Marshall:** I happened to look at the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* the other day and saw a headline which stated that the

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House leader was a man of vision and ability. Apparently he had a piece of the action as well, because in the task force review it suggests that one of the areas which will receive immediate attention is that dealing with a proposed voluntary coastguard auxiliary, with the indication that implementation guidelines are expected early this summer. The House leader made an announcement in Sydney that there is going to be a coastguard facility there, so obviously he is getting a piece of the action.

I sometimes wonder what we as members are doing here, because anybody in Canada can write to a minister and get the same kind of answer that we get. If we cannot act on behalf of our constituents in a knowledgeable manner by having access to material the minister has promised to table, then I wonder what we are doing here as members. This report should be tabled and debated in the House.

**Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Halifax-Dartmouth East):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to address my remarks to the question of privilege now before the House and I will confine them to the point raised by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). There are certain parliamentary traditions which are adhered to and honoured and which through usage over a period of time have in fact become rights. As a layman, I suggest that is certainly a clear principle in common law and it is certainly a principle in natural law.

There is some desire on the part of the government to use the time of the House efficiently, and for that reason ministers often make statements outside the House on matters of local concern. This is understandable and acceptable. However, notwithstanding that desire on the part of the government, the degree to which ministers are making statements regarding various parts of the country, not in this House but outside it, for whatever reason, is becoming quite alarming.

These statements very often involve major changes to government policy. For example, I understand the minister intends to make an announcement this evening. I do not know what the minister will say, but I expect members of the press already have a copy of that announcement. Such a procedure affects my rights as a member and, therefore, the privileges I have as a member in my place in this House.

I am unable at this point to determine what the implications of the minister's statement might be. I am unable to do that on behalf of the people of Nova Scotia, particularly in the Halifax-Dartmouth area, on the south shore, the north shore and the east shore. I would like to know how many additional boats we are going to have, whether we are going to have new helicopters or air-cushion vehicles, as well as the number of additional personnel involved. I should like to know just what the situation will be. I wonder how long it will be before the people of Nova Scotia fully understand the implications of the change in policy to be announced this evening by the minister. Any statement in respect of a substantive policy change should be made on the floor of the House of Commons. In this way the representatives of the people affected would have the opportunity of determining the implications.