

Privilege—Mr. Nielsen

cut back swollen deficits or whether it will be an expansive one which will add to those deficits. In any treasury or ministerial decision that obviously was one of the first things that had to be decided. Yesterday afternoon—and the evidence is absolutely irrefutable—the Minister, through his own action—not some hireling, not any process, not through anyone else but the Minister himself through his own very foolish, if not stupid, action—released the nub of that budget philosophy and concept of governmental policy at a time when it could be acted upon by others. I suggest that before 24 hours is out there will be irrefutable evidence before you that others have acted on that evidence in a way in which they can only enrich their own wallets and bank accounts.

● (1140)

This was a breach of the privileges of the House because it has been a set concept from time immemorial that the budget provisions, the main budget provision especially, should be kept secret until announced in the House. There is no question that that privilege was broken yesterday afternoon. The Minister may have done so in a way that was unintentional, although there are those who even doubt that, but it happened in any event. That is enough, surely, to indicate that there is a prima facie case of breach of the privileges of the House.

It did not matter in the Dalton case whether the Minister resigned or not. That was irrelevant. The question was whether or not a leak of a very minor budget secret under those circumstances was enough to present to the Chair of the British House of Commons evidence that a breach of privilege had taken place.

It is my submission, Madam Speaker, that that precedent is on all fours with the matter before you, with one grave, gross change. That is the fact that what was released for the knowledge of everyone who watched the television newscasts last night or this morning, or listened to the radio or read the national newspapers of this country, was the basic concept of what the policy of this Government is with respect to its budget and financial policy over the next year. Surely this is a more serious and gross case than the Dalton case in Britain.

Another matter which I think the Chair should very seriously consider is the whole question of the oath of secrecy of the Minister. It does not entail how secrets are released or why they are released. It only involves a breach of an oath of secrecy when secrets themselves are released. Is there any question in anyone's mind today that a budget secret was released yesterday or even that there was an intention to at least give an indication that a budget secret was released? To my mind, that would be even a more serious question to be resolved as far as the integrity and public morality of an elected official of this House is concerned.

It is not the credibility of the Minister that is at stake in this matter. I suggest that he has no credibility now, but that is irrelevant. What is essentially at stake here is the credibility of the House of Commons, the credibility of an oath of secrecy and the credibility of a Government which will permit the release of information such as this so that those who are already wealthy and powerful in this country and in the

international money markets of the western world can make a fat profit at the expense of the ordinary person. That is really the basis of the credibility that is before us.

I think it is almost inescapable that your decision, which I am glad to hear you will make today, will be that there was a breach of the fundamental privileges of the House. Only a prima facie case has to be demonstrated before you, Madam Speaker. No matter what arguments may come from the other side, there will be no disguising the fact that through carelessness, intent, or any other motive which we may or may not ascribe to this Minister, a serious breach of a fundamental concept of fiscal policy in the budget was released yesterday afternoon. That in itself is enough to demonstrate, to my mind, a fundamental breach of the privileges of this House as well.

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, I rise with some regret to add my support to the motion made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Nielsen) and to suggest that there can be no doubt that information which was intended to be secret was revealed to the press yesterday.

I do not believe there is any question in anyone's mind that the press reports of last evening and today clearly indicate that certain members of the press, if not all, had access to some, if not all, of the contents of the budget to be presented here this evening at eight o'clock. That is quite clearly a violation of the principles that everyone believes are the principles of secrecy pertaining to the presentation of a budget.

I would suggest that this is even more serious than the Dalton affair. It is more serious since, in the case of Hugh Dalton, he inadvertently allowed a hint of what might be in the budget to pass between himself and a friend who was a member of the media immediately prior to the presentation of his budget. With the benefit of hindsight and having read the Hugh Dalton memoirs, it is quite clear that it would have been difficult to have taken advantage of the situation even with that information.

● (1150)

However, what every single Minister of Finance and every Chancellor of the Exchequer has realized is that budget secrecy is an absolute must. There can be no deviation from the principle that a budget must remain secret until it is presented to the House of Commons.

I want to refer Hon. Members to what Walter Gordon, a former Minister of Finance, said in a book about his life. Perhaps it may not legitimately be described as his memoirs. However, at page 155 of his book, which is entitled "A Political Memoir", he said:

There is also the question of "budget secrecy" and the absolute responsibility of the Minister of Finance for any leaks that might occur, intentionally or by misadventure, through the action of any member of his department (or any other department, including the printing bureau). For example, Wynne Plumptre told me long afterwards that he took his draft of the 1963 budget speech home with him the night before he presented it to me. He had planned to read it through again before delivering it the next morning. But it was his birthday and his wife had arranged for them to go out to visit friends. So Wynne locked the draft speech in his briefcase which he hid in a cupboard. On his return later in the