

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 28, 1966

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

### PRIVILEGE

#### MR. IRVINE—INABILITY TO OBTAIN ELECTORAL COMMISSION REPORTS

**Mr. Jack A. Irvine (London):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege arising out of proceedings in this house. Previous to the opening of parliament I sent in certain questions for the order paper, one of which became question No. 48. It was supposed to have been answered yesterday, but I suggest that what was given was hardly in the nature of a reply.

The question had to do with the cost of advertising in various daily newspapers throughout the country regarding the proposed federal electoral districts. The answer I received to my question is as follows:

As was stated in reply to question No. 148 on February 2, 1966, pages 585-6 of *Hansard*, the commissions set up under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act do not report to the government so that the government does not have records giving the information sought in this question. Under section 10 of the act the commissions are not agencies of Her Majesty. Reports of the commissions are made directly to the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, are not the readjustment commissions directly or indirectly employed by this house? Are they not responsible to anyone, or do they just kind of sail off all by themselves and do whatever they wish? Can they squander perhaps millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money and not have to account for it? This seems to me to be very unreasonable.

• (2:40 p.m.)

I think there are many people throughout the country and in this house who want to know exactly how much this program did cost. I would not say it looks as though it was money thrown into an election campaign, because I do not think that would be fair, but some time I would like to move or cause to be moved if it is not my prerogative, that the redistribution commissions be not paid until such time as they have made a proper accounting to the members of this house of exactly how much money was spent and in what manner it was spent. The people of Canada want to know this, Mr. Speaker, and I should like to know it too.

**Hon. R. A. Bell (Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, on the question of privilege raised by the hon. gentleman may I say that at least part No. 5 of question 48 is within the knowledge of the government. That part is, what was the total cost for this entire program? These cheques were issued by the comptroller of the treasury, who is in a position, then, to answer the question.

This same matter has been before the house on other occasions in respect of certain questions that I asked. Incorrect and improper answers were first given, and it was necessary for me to ask whether the comptroller of the treasury had issued the cheques. He admitted that he had, and the information was forthcoming. I venture to suggest to the Minister of Finance that the answer to question 48, certainly in so far as it applies to part No. 5, is totally erroneous.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The question of privilege just raised by the hon. member for London is substantially the same as that which was raised yesterday in the house by the hon. member for Edmonton West. I have since then considered the matter, as I said yesterday I would.

If I may summarize the problem, the hon. member for Edmonton West and the hon. member for London had asked for certain information with respect to commissions set up under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. The answer provided by the Secretary of State in the three cases was generally to the effect that the commissions set up under the act do not report to the government but rather to the House of Commons, and that the government does not have at its disposal the information sought.

The hon. member for Edmonton West took the position that the individual representation commissions are emanations of the house and responsible to the house, and that the only method of communication with the commissions is through the Secretary of State. The hon. member went on to say he realized that the commissions are not responsible to the government, and in the course of his remarks suggested that the Chair take under consideration the question of the possibility of compelling the commissions to answer. I indicated, as I said, that the matter would be