

Question of Privilege

Mr. Speaker: I will read the motion, without putting it to the house:

I move that the question of breach of privilege raised on Thursday October 20, 1966 by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona dealing with an article in *Le Droit*, Ottawa, Friday, October 14, 1966, under the by-line of Marcel Pepin (English *Hansard* page 8890), be referred to the standing committee on privileges and elections for investigation and report.

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I have just one point to raise in respect of this matter. The article contains several paragraphs and takes about a column in *Hansard*. The greater part of it reports the events as they happened in the House of Commons, with an opinion of the writer. Unless there is some pinning down of what is to be referred to the committee on privileges and elections it seems to me that committee would be going into matters that are no part of its proper function; not only that, but in so doing the committee would be interfering with the right of members of the press freely to report the proceedings in this house as they see them.

If the hon. member wishes to pin this down it is possible he could do so by referring to certain paragraphs. For instance, there is one—I will read the English translation, but I would hope the committee would deal with the original language of the article when they are dealing with it—where it states:

The latter directed from the public gallery the attack of the Conservative member Terry Nugent against Hon. Mr. Hellyer, Wednesday.

If that does denote some act or some participation on the part of the hon. member which would cast some reflection on him, then it well may be privileged; but if it merely describes the conduct of a spectator in the gallery, then there is no privilege involved so far as the hon. member is concerned. The other parts of the story have no relationship to any question of privilege. For instance, there is this paragraph:

Our informant maintains that half a dozen superior navy officers have been plotting at the Chester club in Halifax since the appointment of General Allard.

Surely whether such a meeting did or did not go on, or whether there was or was not that kind of action, it is legitimate for a reporter to report that, and it is of no concern as a question of privilege to any hon. member because it is not related to any hon. member in the house.

[Mr. McIlraith.]

I could point out other paragraphs, such as the following:

The appointment of General Allard and the replacement of Rear Admiral Landymore by Rear Admiral O'Brien, an Irish Catholic, has angered the defenders of the bastion.

Where is there an interference with the privilege of an hon. member of the house in that kind of a statement?

My point is that the motion is lacking in precision and does not have a reference to the committee for study which would enable it to do its work and find out whether or not there has been a breach of privilege. I respectfully submit that the hon. member should be required either to describe the point of privilege or to cite the paragraph which in his opinion offends against privilege. Your Honour would then have to rule as to whether they constituted what could be considered as a breach of privilege.

The new motion with which we are confronted today is really totally different from the motion presented last week, and to the extent that it does seek to refer a matter to the committee on privileges and elections it is acceptable, but there is no use in attempting to clear up the procedural point raised by the hon. member by making the mistake of materially weakening or curtailing the right of the press to report events here as they see them. That is undoubtedly their right, and we must not through any carelessness in our procedure cut down or in any way restrict that valuable right of freedom of the press to report.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I find that the motion introduced by the member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Nugent) is written in English only and reads as follows:

[English]

I move that the question of breach of privilege raised on Thursday, October 20, 1966, by the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona, dealing with an article in *Le Droit*, Ottawa, Friday, October 14, 1966, under the by-line of Marcel Pepin, (English *Hansard* page 8890) be referred to the standing committee on privileges and elections for investigation and report.

● (2:50 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, over the weekend I heard some people suggest that the member for Edmonton-Strathcona seemed to attack a French speaking journalist because he is French.