

**An hon. Member:** What are you talking about?

**Mr. Fleming:** Allow me to go on. I tried very hard in my position as the chairman of the cabinet committee on communications to be sure that those advertisements were not unfair and did not take undue advantage. It would have been simple enough to say in an ad "Liberalize the Constitution", like "Conserve Ontario." We did not do that although the government of Ontario, I think, is under attack for questionable practices.

We have not put out a position of this government in any form using the taxpayers' money, in the sense of advertising, such as the Premier of British Columbia has done. I was pleased to hear the former government House leader say a few moments ago that his own government, in power last year, spent a considerable amount of money on information and advertising—perhaps it was the Leader of the Opposition that said that—some \$30 million to \$40 million. Again I argue: how can you have a question of privilege about advertising when—and again I argue this strenuously—it gave no unfair advantage to or presented any particular case of this side of the House?

When I deal with the comments of the hon. member for Richmond-South Delta (Mr. Siddon) and from several other members, such as the former minister of finance, this righteous indignation that we have gone off sloganeering and have this great advantage, I again argue this certainly has not been the view of all members opposite because it was in the midst of the August campaign that the president of the treasury board of the last government, known as "The Slasher" to some, who cut down on spending—and we had questions today from the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) about spending this money versus immunizing your children, the kind of mixing of two different things which I thought was not fair treatment—we had the call from the office of the former president of the treasury board asking how they could get some of those nice constitutional ads on their local radio stations. I have a letter from the member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees) who wrote:

Dear Jim,

I am enclosing a copy of a federal government advertisement which appeared in various newspapers including the *Stirling News-Argus* and the *Brighton Independent*, which are both in my riding. I think this is an excellent advertisement.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Fleming:** That was the hon. member for Northumberland! So, they are certainly not all of one mind on the usefulness or lack of usefulness or worth of this kind of advertising. I am delighted that at least the hon. member for Northumberland in the opposition feels that it is important that we inform the Canadian public and keep their interest and minds aware of this very important discussion, and not let it fade away to the point at which the view of all sides of this House that there should be reform does not come to a focus and action is taken.

I mentioned earlier the case of Mr. Blakeney. I believe it was the Leader of the Opposition who asked me to make the

*Privilege—Mr. McGrath*

pledge that I would muzzle any further ads and would not let it happen; I would not take unfair advantage. Well, I give the pledge that I will not be a part of taking any unfair advantage. But I will not muzzle the ability of the federal government to talk to Canadians and inform them when we have a threat from the New Democratic Party Premier of Saskatchewan that he will do that, and we have Premier Bennett already doing it.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh!

**An hon. Member:** Come on!

**Mr. Fleming:** I believe I have a responsibility to assist in the informing of the Canadian public. That should be done within a context, and I have tried to describe that context. It is fair to express concern, and hon. members opposite have done that today. But I say: you are not all of one mind. Some members say it is worthwhile, and from the reactions of the Canadian people it can be seen that they did not buy your arguments all through August.

● (1650)

I think the Canadian public wants to be kept aware and informed of what is happening in Parliament, and within that context I can agree with a set of principles. But I also believe that with such an important debate before the House, to take up the time which has been used today, I suggest—and I have a right in this House of Commons to give my views—that what we are getting is a big blue balloon floated to cover up red faces who do not want to look forward to a vote because the Canadian public will be very unhappy when they understand the position of the official opposition.

**Mr. Clark:** That is one of the weakest performances this House has ever seen, Jim.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** You have no case so you pound the table.

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. As I said previously, this will be the last speaker whom I will hear on this question. As many arguments were put forward and feelings were very strong on this particular question, and as I would like to go over all the different arguments which have been brought forward to ascertain whether there is a prima facie case of privilege, I shall take this matter under advisement.

**Mr. Clark:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order, when the Minister of State for Multiculturalism was speaking, he made reference to a survey which he said his department had conducted of various newspapers across the country. I gather that there was some contact on behalf of the government with editors or editorial writers to take their survey.

**An hon. Member:** That is not a point of order.

**Mr. Clark:** The reason I raise the matter is that if the practice of having government advertising prior to taking a