

Question of Privilege

responsible manner. Let us consider just one statement made by the Minister of Justice today. I ask any serious-minded member of this house to try and tell me this is the statement of a responsible minister. The Minister of Justice makes the sort of allegations which leave many former cabinet members under a cloud. He places a serious smear on the reputation of the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) by saying that he improperly used his office when Prime Minister. He tells this house that he learned something about this conduct, but has the effrontery while making these grave charges, and making sure that he hits the headlines both inside and outside the house by reason of his statements, to say there is an R.C.M.P. report that he has not even seen.

Would this not offend the sensibilities of any member who wishes to go back to his constituency and say that he has conscientiously carried out his duty as a member of parliament to make sure there is a responsible government in this country? Here is a Minister of Justice who takes that sort of action and blandly tells this house, to the applause of the Liberal backbenchers, that he has not even bothered to read a report which may clear up all those misgivings in his mind or may substantiate them. The Minister of Justice was invited by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition to bring this report forward. He mentioned this last Friday. He has called press conferences. He has made these statements again today and tells us there is a report. Then he says he has not even seen it.

● (7:40 p.m.)

I ask all hon. members of this house who believe in responsible government if they are going to abandon their duty to make sure the government acts responsibly. What hon. member on either side of the house would call this a responsible government? What hon. member would suggest there is more serious business for this house to consider right now than the conduct of this government? It is not just the Minister of Justice but also the Prime Minister and his cabinet members who are concerned. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the most serious questions affecting this house are those matters which go to the root of our system of government. Democratic government can only survive if you and I, the elected members of this house, are conscious of and conscientious about our duty to keep the government responsible to this house. We have a responsibility to those

[Mr. Nugent.]

who elected us. We have to answer. What did we let the government get away with?

I am submitting that when the government officially allows a minister to act in this manner, it is our duty to make sure that all else ceases till the position is made clear. I would move a motion now that we go into committee of the whole house if the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cardin) would like to bring the facts forward and explain them. In committee of the whole, witnesses could be brought before the bar of the house and examined. If the facts are such as alleged by the Minister of Justice—that the former Prime Minister mishandled his office—then obviously the Minister of Justice should take this course, and I want to give him the opportunity of so doing. When he makes such allegations he has a duty to this house to prove them.

Mr. Nielsen: It is an accusation.

Mr. Nugent: I would move the motion now if I thought there was any hope of the Minister of Justice complying.

As I understand the position on the other side of the house, it is that it is perfectly all right for Privy Councillors to live under the suspicion that perhaps they are the ones who behaved so very badly, while all the time the Minister of Justice has a file, which he has not bothered to look at, which would clear the matter up. It is perfectly in agreement with Liberal principles that those Privy Councillors should be stained in that way, shall I say. This is what hon. members opposite are saying.

I could raise a question of privilege of my own very simply. I come to this house as a member with a duty I want to uphold. I do not believe that my position in this house should subject me to the witnessing of the sword of insinuation or accusation being directed toward these Privy Councillors by the Minister of Justice. I could raise a question of personal privilege as to whether I, as an elected member of parliament, must sit in this house at the same time as another member of the house who acts in this way. I believe that would be a very proper question of privilege for the house to consider.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) seems rather amused at my statement. I suppose the question of responsible government is a laughing matter with the Prime Minister because we have certainly seen very little of it under his tenure of office. I hope that the Prime Minister, who speaks for a government