

Privilege—Mr. Brewin

it to be false—and I am not suggesting for a moment that that is what the situation is here—but if he did that, sir, you would be entitled to find, if you were able to determine that was the fact either by admission or otherwise, it would be the basis for a prima facie case of privilege, and then it should be investigated. I do not think there is any question about that.

I think the next step down the road must be: can the minister, under our system of ministerial responsibility, continue as has been the practice now which has developed over the past few years, can he, and may he indeed, according to our parliamentary tradition, fail to accept responsibility and not have this matter looked into, not on the basis that it is a lie with malice or forethought and so on, but somehow that the information given to them was false? I can give you a number of instances, sir, where that same argument has been brought up over and over again, unfortunately by members of this particular administration. The Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) on two different occasions, to my recollection, used that same doctrine that, while the information he gave he thought to be true, it was based upon misinformation given to him either by somebody in his office or a departmental employee.

I say to you, sir, that it is not good enough for the Solicitor General to stand in this House and suggest that there was a misunderstanding by him on the basis of information given, if that is what he said, or rather that he got information provided to him which tended to mislead the hon. member for Greenwood. I think the matter should be investigated because it is a fundamental question of ministerial responsibility. I simply submit, sir, that as I understood the excuse of the Solicitor General, it should not be enough to discount the matter, and for you to overlook it, but rather we should have the matter investigated to determine precisely what we mean in this House by ministerial responsibility and ministerial accountability to this parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have given very careful attention to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin). As he will be aware, I have directed my attention already to many of the principles that have governed this question. They have been argued in a similar way, although in much different circumstances, only a few days ago in the question of privilege to which reference was made often this afternoon, raised by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence).

However, there is one very important difference that I am sure all hon. members will recognize in this instance over that other case. There are several differences, but one is quite fundamental to our procedure. That is to say, in his intervention today the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) did not in any way alter or change the content of his reply, or in any way indicate that he was dissatisfied with the reply he had given on an earlier occasion. In other words, in his intervention today he said, "Having had the question of privilege brought to my attention, I reviewed my reply. I stand by it; it is the reply I made at the time. It was on proper information at the time, and it is the reply I should have made under the circumstances

[Mr. Hnatyshyn.]

at that particular time." Now whether that is right or not, it is not for me to judge. I am not the one in this situation to judge the accuracy of the facts involved.

I am certain there will be considerable disagreement, and interesting discussion is possible as to whether or not one side has merit or the other side has merit in these particular circumstances. However, that does not alter the basic fact that a question of privilege is essentially a procedural argument, and, once the minister has said that this is the reply he intended to give, and upon reviewing his information, he feels that it is the proper reply in the circumstances, it seems to me that that takes it out of the area of procedure and perhaps puts it into an area of debate or may raise it into the area of other remedies. Once the minister stands in his place and says "I have reviewed the reply, that reply was accurate and proper," I am bound to accept that, and the House is bound to accept that, no matter how violently the House may disagree with the interpretation the minister puts on that. It may pursue that violent disagreement another way, but in any case that seems to me to take the matter entirely out of the question of procedure and leave it in the realm of debate and disagreement, which is a different matter altogether.

Therefore, with that fundamental difference in mind, I really do not think at this moment, on the information that has been put before me today, that I can pursue this matter as a question of privilege.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 67, 164 and 279. I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

[Text]

IVOR WYNNE STADIUM IN HAMILTON

Question No. 67—**Mr. Beatty:**

1. On the weekend of February 3, 4 and 5, 1978, did the Minister of Labour use government aircraft to fly to Vancouver and other places in Western Canada to convince owners of Canadian Football League teams to block the sale of the Hamilton Tiger Cats to Mr. Harold Ballard and, if so (a) what was the cost to the taxpayer for the minister's trip (b) who were the other members of the minister's party (c) in what way did the trip to western Canada relate to the official duties of the minister?

2. Does the Minister of Agriculture intend to make a grant to the owners of Ivor Wynne Stadium in Hamilton to cover 90 per cent of the cost of new seating as urged by the Minister of Labour and, if so (a) from what existing fund, if any, does the Minister intend to make such a grant (b) is the Minister of Agriculture and/or the Minister of Labour reconsidering making the grant in view of the fact that Mr. Ballard now owns the Hamilton Tiger Cats?