

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

Mr. MacEachen:—because I took the additional step of providing additional information to the House of Commons in an effort to demonstrate that this is an open government and ready to tell the House of Commons all the facts.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I doubt if anyone would contend that last night was one of Parliament's finest hours.

Mr. Nowlan: We wasted an hour.

Mr. Knowles: As a matter of fact, I believe what happened is a matter of serious concern. We may be able to argue from both sides on the basis of the rules and the citations, but in my view what happened goes deeper than that. I shall come to what I have in mind in a moment, but first I should like to comment on one or two points of detail.

I was deeply disturbed last evening when I heard the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), who at that time was trying to get the floor, say that there had been an agreement among the whips that he would follow the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen). I take it that the phrase "the whips" is an all-inclusive one which can include whips and House leaders; but I say on my behalf and on behalf of the whip of this party, the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), that we had not been consulted on that point at all. We had not been told a word about the possibility of the hon. member for St. John's West following the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Nystrom: Shame on John.

Mr. Knowles: The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Collenette) came over and talked to me during the latter part of the afternoon about the arrangements which were being made so that the Minister of Finance would get on at eight o'clock. That arrangement involved having two Conservative speakers in a row just before six o'clock. Did I object? Not at all. But there was no suggestion at all as to what would happen after the Minister of Finance spoke.

I went to the Chair several times to make sure that the name of the hon. member for Winnipeg-St. James (Mr. Keeper) was in the place which had been assigned to him, and it was. There was no question at all about the order of speakers. Therefore, although I was not surprised at the hon. member for St. John's West trying to get the floor, I am surprised, shocked and disturbed to learn that there was some kind of consultation with people who may have had authority but perhaps did not have authority, but in which we were not involved. The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) came over to me last night and said that he did not know about it, but the word "hanky-panky" is not too strong to use about this kind of thing.

An hon. Member: I can think of some better ones.

Mr. Knowles: I just remind the two older parties in this House that there are three parties here, and that the work of this House will proceed much better if we are all consulted on matters of this kind.

Before I get to what I think is the most serious part of this whole matter, may I say that I am not as greatly impressed by the indignation of my friends to the right as they might expect me to be. I had a feeling last night, and I have it again today, that they cannot attack the budget—budget or non-budget, whatever it was—brought in last night by the Minister of Finance because it was the same as the budget they brought in.

An hon. Member: No.

Mr. Knowles: Oh, just about the same. So instead they are attacking the Minister of Finance on the procedure that he used. However, this kind of procedure has been tried one way and another across the years. The Minister of Finance referred to the press release last summer by the former minister of finance. I remember long ago, before some of my hon. colleagues were born, that Mr. Abbott brought in taxation by announcing it over the radio.

● (1240)

If you want to read the debate on procedure, which was dramatic and went on for a long time, go back to about 1948 when we contended that taxes should be announced in the House of Commons, not over the radio. That was before the days of television. I also remember the last time we had a Conservative government before the one of last year, the one headed by the late Right Hon. John G. Diefenbaker. We had a minister of finance by the name of Donald Fleming at that time. He was like the present Minister of Finance. He did not want to bring in a budget; he wanted to find some way of getting around it. So when in December, 1957, we were discussing estimates—in those days we dealt with estimates on the floor of the House, instead of shipping them off to committees—Mr. Fleming rose during the course of a debate on estimates and gave us what in effect was a budget speech.

All of the arguments that we have heard today, that it is a mini-budget, a non-budget, a "mousey" budget—we heard all of that at that time, and the debate went on for hours. In the end, the Tories won the day and Mr. Fleming was allowed to present his resolutions and to make budget proposals. But what annoyed us was that he was a minister of finance who did not want to bring in a budget, yet he had to tell the House how things were going and he had to propose certain taxes, so he chose an unusual way of doing what the House prefers to be done according to the practices surrounding a budget presentation.

So, Madam Speaker, there is a lot of work for you and those at the table to do in reading the precedents before you make a ruling as to whether the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton has a point of privilege in precise procedural terms. But, as I said earlier, despite the fact that I have taken a crack or two at my friends to the right who have raised this issue, I think it is