

Privilege

a manner which was more accurate than it had been in the past.

Again today, Canadians realize that information that had been given to this House only a few days ago in relation to expenditures on travel by the Prime Minister were inaccurate. Indeed, Order Paper Question No.162, when answered in this House, stated that the cost of the trip in question to southeast Asia was in the amount of \$544,000 approximately.

Today, Mr. Ross Howard of *The Globe and Mail* reported, and I verified this with him, that the access to information register confirmed to him that the actual amount of the expenditure was \$670,000, an amount which is over 30 per cent higher than what was provided to me in terms of the Order Paper question response.

We have already been through some debate in this House as to the obligation of the government under Standing Order 39(5) to reply promptly within the 45-day limit. That, of course, was not respected. It took over 90 days for the government to provide information which has now proven to be inaccurate, but I shall not dwell on the matter of the government taking too much time to answer the question.

Instead, I want to ask for the assistance of the House, because I do believe that the privileges of all members of Parliament are affected when the government fails to provide proper information to us. Erskine May has defined the following on page 69 of the *Parliamentary Practice*, Twenty-first Edition:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House individually,—

The next portion is what I feel is really relevant here:

—without which they could not discharge their functions,—

In order for us, as parliamentarians, to discharge our functions appropriately, surely it is incumbent upon the government and upon officials working for the government to provide not only the questioner, in this case myself through the Order Paper question, but the House with accurate information.

• (1510)

There is a further incident I want to bring to your attention which, I submit, clearly demonstrates not only the obligation that the government and officials of the government have in providing accurate information to the House, but the case has been raised in the past that

failure to do so on the part of certain individuals constituted contempt of Parliament.

I draw to your attention Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege* page 198, in which Maingot states:

Similarly, should any person present documents to a committee of the House of Commons which have been forged, falsified, or fabricated with intent to deceive such committee or the House, or, to be privy to such forging or fraud, will constitute contempt of Parliament—

This was in reference to actions by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which the House determined had acted in a manner which constituted a prima facie case of contempt when the RCMP had failed to provide accurate information to the House in an incident involving the Hon. Member for Northumberland—Durham on December 4, 1973. At that time, it was clearly demonstrated that the actions of the officials of the RCMP were in contempt of this House.

In summary, I want to indicate that I am prepared to move the appropriate motion to refer this matter to committee. The House will be aware that members are desperately trying to find out quick, timely and accurate information pursuant to the rules. The information that was provided to me was not provided in the appropriate time according to the rules, and it has now been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, according to the access to information laws of the country, to be inaccurate.

I want to reiterate that I am prepared to move the appropriate motion to refer this matter to committee so that we can hopefully improve upon the procedure of obtaining this information so that all members and, indeed, Canadians can be properly served by this process in the future.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, when I saw the article in the newspaper this morning I decided myself to look into why there would appear to be some discrepancies.

I want to say that it is very simple. If one looks at the questions asked by the hon. member, questions about which you know I have complained on several occasions regarding the detail, trivia and silly pieces of information that I felt the member was looking for, such as: "Did the Prime Minister visit Malaysia and Costa Rica in October, 1989 and, if so—" and so on into considerable detail down to how much gasoline was utilized, what the approximate number of kilometers were and how many pieces of luggage were carried along on the trip. There