

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 18, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. SKOBERG—PUBLICATION OF BOOKLET "HOW YOUR TAX DOLLAR IS SPENT"

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, I have given notice of my intention to raise a question of privilege concerning the publication by Information Canada at public expense of a booklet called "How Your Tax Dollar Is Spent". If you find my question of privilege is well taken I will be prepared to introduce a motion.

In the introduction to this booklet the President of the Treasury Board makes it known that the tabling of the estimates is being used as an occasion upon which to provide a greater amount of information about the estimates. He also advises that the booklet will be available to members of the general public through Information Canada upon request. He states that the publication also describes the allocations recommended for the particular year 1971-72 in terms of the priorities of the nation, and, consequently, of the government.

I agree that the public is entitled to the maximum amount of public information, but we must be concerned lest such an instrument of information as Information Canada be converted into an instrument of propaganda. Over the past years we have attempted to obtain consultant reports in order that the people of Canada may know what is going on, but in most cases these have been denied to us. Now the public, by means of the booklet in question, and at large public expense, is being given a shot of strictly government propaganda through the publication of this booklet by Information Canada which we were told would never be used for this purpose. I would refer Your Honour to just a couple of paragraphs in an effort to make my point. On page 10 the following words appear:

In these discussions ministers considered certain basic facts. One of the more basic was that while Canada as a whole enjoys one of the world's highest standards of living, many Canadians are finding it difficult to get by.

A little further down the page we read:

The federal government has for some years been attempting to narrow this gap between rich and poor provinces and since 1968 has intensified these efforts.

On page 11 we find the following:

Before it decides how to allocate your dollars, the government must determine how big its total spending program should be. It is no easy matter to arrive at a total such as the \$14,352 million the government has proposed to Parliament for 1971-72. More than a year ahead, a forecast is made of the state of the economy.

This appears accompanied by a side heading "Decisions, Decisions".

If material such as this is allowed to continue to be published at public expense, and the opposition has no means of countering such propaganda, what is the purpose of this House? If the government is allowed to use public moneys to finance the publication of what they wish to put out for public consumption, to what length will the government go in the course of the so-called rationalization of government information?

In conclusion, I would say that Information Canada should not be used for the dissemination of political party propaganda. I sincerely urge you to recognize the dangers inherent in the absence of controls over the nature of the services to be provided. The only way in which this could be done would be by means of an all-party understanding, and for this to be reached it would be necessary for a committee of the House to explore the charges I have made.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (2:10 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has given the Chair notice of his intention to raise the matter to which he has just referred by way of a question of privilege. The Chair has had an opportunity to give the matter some thought. I have listened closely and with interest to the comments made by the hon. member. I have to advise the House that, although there may be a grievance in what the hon. member has said, there cannot be a question of privilege. In the circumstances I do not think that the motion to which the hon. member has alluded can be put at this time.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

POLLUTION

POSSIBLE THREAT TO BRITISH COLUMBIA COAST—REQUEST FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT TO MOVE MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, on a matter of urgent and pressing necessity I propose to ask the unanimous consent of the House to put a motion. The justified anxiety of Canadians about the ever-increasing pollution of the Canadian heritage—our lands, our seas, our inland waters and the air we breathe—is reflected in the legislation that was enacted by this Parliament in the last session and in the several bills now under consideration by this House. A developing threat to our west coast seas and thereby to present and future residents of British Columbia, among whom are our coastal Indians, has become a clear and present danger with the TAPS