

Privilege—Mr. Domm

I am not persuaded by your economic arguments. I believe that the decision to move is the correct one from an administrative point of view, and will prove to be correct on economic grounds. The question of the move has been causing a good deal of uncertainty for a number of years. A decision had to be made, and I have made it, and, I believe, for sensible reasons.

The decision he made was to confirm the decision that had already been made by a predecessor minister and which had been deferred because of the understandable representations by the hon. member for Stormont-Dundas. The important thing, Madam Speaker, is that this decision had been made, not by the government of the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), but that the statement had been made by a former government. It had merely been carried out and confirmed by the then minister of the environment on the grounds which the letter sets forth.

It could be, as the parliamentary secretary has said, that he was put in the position of inadvertently leading the House because his statement, which he has just told us was based on information from officials, is completely the reverse. His statement is as follows:

The move was first initiated by a Liberal administration. It was deferred by a Tory administration—

That is absolutely wrong according to the statements that we have, so we have a conflict. He continued:

—and it was rescinded by the present Liberal administration—

I respectfully suggest, Madam Speaker, that if you read the complete statement made by the parliamentary secretary, you will see that there is an implication in it that somehow or other the hon. member for Peterborough was involved in a way in which he says he was not involved.

I think it is important that we find the facts, particularly in view of the final statement made by the parliamentary secretary about what officials may have told him and which may have given rise to the question of privilege in the first place.

On those grounds, Madam Speaker, I think it is important that we go to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections so that the matter can be settled, and if the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Cosgrove) has information which is relevant, that he be brought to the committee. Also if the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) has information that is relevant, that too should be brought to the committee; and documents which are now with the Department of the Environment and which have been referred to by the parliamentary secretary to the present minister and by the former minister should be laid on the table so that we can get at the truth of what has occurred.

I suppose if questions of privilege mean anything at all with respect to members of the House, they mean searching for the truth when there is a difference of such an important dimension. I should like to commend to you with respect, Madam Speaker, that you consider that and that you look at the statement made by the parliamentary secretary last night, the questions answered by the minister today, and that you defer your decision with respect to this question of privilege.

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): I rise on the same question of privilege, Madam

Speaker. The hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) suggested that I was intentionally or unintentionally misleading the House with respect to my statement regarding the costs of cancelling the move from Cornwall to Peterborough. If I may, I will take a moment to clarify the statement I made to the hon. member as I intended to make it, and I undertake to the hon. gentleman to provide him with the information to which I was making reference. If I was wrong, I apologize, but these are the costs I was talking about and I thought I made it clear in my response.

I was talking about the costs of that move in terms of the lease cancellation in Peterborough, in terms of basically dealing with mortgages on homes, in terms of dealing with employees who had to be moved and relocated; in other words, the direct costs of that move. I thought my answer was clear on that point.

The hon. member says that his officials advised him that it was cost advantageous to the public, and so on, for Parks Canada to be situated in Peterborough. That, Madam Speaker, I did not intend to include in my response. That is a judgment that obviously his officials made and gave to him. I would presume that is prospective in terms of whatever advantages, in their view, might accrue to Parks Canada from being located in Peterborough.

My comment was limited to the cost of that move and its cancellation, Madam Speaker. The hon. member may wish to raise some doubt with respect to that statement and I would be happy to verify that that is my recollection of the numbers which I examined, and which I do not, unfortunately, have with me today.

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (York-Peel): Madam Speaker, if I may also join in support of my colleague's question of privilege, I think it is most important when an allegation is made by a member of the government against a member on this side, or in fact against any member of the House, that is so obviously untrue, that the motion of my hon. friend be granted and that there be a proper referral to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

I say this because I am most startled to hear a serious suggestion in this House that it was our administration that deferred the decision to move the Parks Canada office from Cornwall to Peterborough. Madam Speaker, it was our administration that agreed to the move, and up to the time that we left office that move was to go ahead, was to progress at a priority rate and was hopefully to be completed by September 1 of this year.

In support of what I am saying, I think it is perhaps wise to review the background of what led up to our decision last fall to approve the move from Cornwall to Peterborough. I would point out that, speaking historically, the proposed move of Parks Canada from Cornwall to Peterborough was not, for example, part of our decentralization program. I think at the time there was some confusion on that, but this move was