

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 5, 1968

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. HOWARD (OKANAGAN BOUNDARY)—
STATEMENT BY MEMBER FOR CAPE
BRETON-EAST RICHMOND

Mr. Bruce Howard (Okanagan Boundary): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal privilege. When the integrity of a member of this house is impugned it is a matter of the greatest seriousness for all hon. members of the house. It is something that one would not expect an hon. member to do lightly and without concrete evidence to prove his statement.

Yesterday the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond (Mr. MacInnis) made a series of vague and rambling statements purporting to show that civil servants were being placed under undue pressure because of my actions. Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the television transcript that was referred to by the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond. As recorded on page 15 of the transcript, supplied by the C.B.C., I said:

The backbencher has the most wonderful safety valve for getting things done and I discovered this accidentally, and that is, every week, every Wednesday morning, there's a government caucus and all you have to do is discuss it in that caucus and refer to a particular minister who hasn't acted the way you think he should act in getting a job done for one of your constituents. If a constituent has a problem, and you haven't satisfaction, you take it to the caucus.

That is the end of that quote, but after an interruption by one of the other panellists I said:

I have the opportunity as a government member to put the minister on the spot in front of the Prime Minister who is sitting there—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary): After a couple of additional interruptions I said:

The merest threat of doing this is enough to get civil servants all down the line making sure that they get that job done that needs being done because they know that if the minister is on the spot, then they're going to be on the spot.

Mr. Baldwin: You haven't got enough spots left.

Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary): Now, Mr. Speaker, it must be very obvious to any fair minded person that having made three references to the "minister" that this was the area of pressure I was talking about and the reference to "civil servants all down the line" was a corollary statement. For the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond to take that reference out of context amounted to a deliberate distortion of the intent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary): I believe it is very important that I state some views on the civil service. Since coming to Ottawa I have been most impressed—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to the hon. member that he should state his question of privilege. I suggest to him that this is not the occasion for him to state his views about the public service.

• (2:40 p.m.)

Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary): Mr. Speaker, I will delete any reference to my feelings for the civil service, but I would go on to say that when such instances affect my constituents I will make the facts known to the minister concerned. I make no apology to anyone for this action. Frequently we see in this house the use or abuse of the rule of privilege for narrow, frivolous and partisan purposes. Such abuse reduces the effectiveness of the house and abrogates the privileges of all its members. Our responsibility is to govern the country and to do so we must first govern our tongues.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Howard (Okanagan Boundary): My constituents sent me here to work for them with vigour, and to speak fairly and honestly in the House of Commons and outside. I am proud that my constituents in Okanagan Boundary expect high standards of performance from me. I deem it a privilege to follow this standard, and I recommend it to the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.