

Privilege—Mr. La Salle

The privileges of the House are part of the law of the land; they were given to the Houses of Parliament for the sake of the subject, and not for the convenience of the member.

I stress that statement because it confirms what I said earlier, that the relationship between this House, members of the press gallery and the public lying beyond is of the utmost importance to the proceedings of this House and the extent to which its proceedings are deemed to be fairly, accurately and properly reported. I should now like to read the following which appears on page 6 of this document:

● (1430)

As recently as 1955 a case arose in Australia which resulted in the proprietor of a newspaper and the writer of an article which appeared in it being sentenced to three months, imprisonment by the House of Representatives for publishing defamatory allegations against a member.

I emphasize the words, "defamatory allegations against a member". The quotation continues:

Another serious case occurred in Great Britain in 1947 which resulted in a member being expelled from the House and the editor of the newspaper for which the member wrote an offending article being severely censured. These were cases in which a gross contempt of the House was clearly established.

Then on page 7 we find these words:

In the session of 1963-64, for example, a complaint was raised against Mr. Quintin Hogg concerning a public speech he made in the course of which he alleged that the then government's "elbows had been jarred in almost every part of the world by individual Labour members' partisanship of subversive activities."

Later in the same article we find this:

The case arose from a press article containing scurrilous allegations against unnamed members of parliament to the effect that they had leaked inside information to the press in exchange for money or drink.

That is terrible, Mr. Speaker. The article continues:

The relevant paragraphs of the committee's report reads as follows: "In modern times the practice of holding private meetings in the precincts of the Palace of Westminster of different parties has become well established and, in the view of your committee, it must now be taken to form a normal and everyday incident of parliamentary procedure"

Then we find the following conclusion:

It follows that an unfounded imputation in regard to such meetings involves an affront to the House as such. Your committee consider that an unjustified allegation that members regularly betray the confidence of private party meetings either for payment or whilst their discretion has been undermined by drink is a serious contempt.

There are similar statements in May's which are well known and to which I shall not refer Your Honour. Some years ago this House and the House in Westminster gave up the right to forbid the publication of speeches made in the House. At one time to publish what was said in the House of Commons was considered contempt and such an act was punishable. That right was given up, but it was made subject to the condition that the debates be correctly and faithfully recorded. That is important, because the public is entitled to expect that the speeches will be faithfully and accurately reported. If that judgment is challenged by statements which appear to have been made by the hon. member for Témiscamingue, obviously the public will not have the degree of confidence in the reporting of what is said in this House to which it is entitled.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

I shall conclude in this light. I realize that if Your Honour holds that there is a prima facie case, and the motion is put and accepted, we will, of course, be constrained to the narrow limits of the motion; but I should like to think that in the not too distant future this matter will be considered by the House since we are talking about a move in the area of televising our proceedings. I shall not say whether I will be for or against such a move. However, since we are facing very obvious problems, I would hope an appropriate committee would make a complete study of questions of privilege.

It seems to me that somehow there must derive, from the allegations contained in the printed record of *Hansard*, the material for determining whether there is a prima facie question of privilege. Either the hon. member for Témiscamingue is correct, and members of this House have paid money to gain some degree of prominence or to have their articles or statements printed or distorted, or the hon. member for Témiscamingue is wrong, in which case he is immediately in contempt of this House for having made such a charge without any proof as to its correctness.

Mr. C. Douglas (Bruce): Mr. Speaker, certainly in no way shall I be as eloquent as the preceding hon. gentlemen, because they have much more experience in addressing this House than I have. Since my motion under Standing Order 43 was mentioned in the discussion of the question of privilege, I would simply point out that the question I posed in presenting it last Friday, although it was not taken too seriously, was given my serious consideration because, as backbenchers, many of us who have arrived here for the first time will be looking to the words of *Hansard* and those that appear in the press as sources on which we must rely.

When an allegation is made such as this, that money has been paid for particular favours, then I think there is certainly a question of privilege, not only in respect of those who are in the front benches but, most definitely, in respect of those of us who are in the back benches.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Douglas (Bruce): We should be able to look with respect upon this place. I feel that alone is enough to make it most definitely a question of privilege for hon. members. To my way of thinking, the members of the parliamentary press gallery should have an opportunity to answer these charges without having to resort to the last means they have, which is making statements in the press against these allegations. I have spent a good number of years as a member of the press, and these allegations came to me as a complete surprise. Although I was not of the stature of some of the members of our parliamentary press gallery, I can say that no one ever offered me money and I never asked for any.

More importantly, I found that colleagues with whom I dealt in my close to 20 years in the press media were most meticulous in governing themselves. They check each other: at least, where I was we certainly checked each other to see that the reporting was without bias and that there was an honest attempt to report the facts as they were presented to us. Certainly, I think members of the