

That is the point of privilege, that my privileges as a member here are being thwarted by manipulation through the use of public money, polls and advertising which are all connected as this government operates on the constitutional question. My privileges are being violated. Therefore, not only should the minister release the polls, which he said he would do at his convenience, selectively, but also information based on that polling which is misleading and wrong, should be stopped.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, very briefly because I consider we have lost a lot of time in the House in the past two days, I would like to ask you if, in light of your many deliberations, you might ponder this case to establish whether the opinions of government technocrats—who are paid out of public funds—give the government should be released and made public to opposition parties. The analogy is there, and I think you should seriously ask yourself the question and I respectfully submit there is no question of privilege here. It is a matter of policy that is debatable, of course, but that does not interfere at all with the rights of members of this House. If the result of the advice given by senior technocrats or the results of polls taken from time to time lead to certain policies, certain bills, then, Madam Speaker, members of this House have the liberty and opportunity to criticize government policies. Having said that, I respectfully submit there is no question of privilege here and it is about time Parliament took its responsibilities and dealt with the urgent and serious matters that are before it.

[*English*]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Very briefly, Madam Speaker, the advertising which my hon. friend the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) was speaking about is in a speaker's kit which reached members' offices last night. It is not only wrong, but almost contemptuous. Not only has this House not completed debate on the subject, but Your Honour has not yet ruled as to whether or not there is a question of privilege in the matters raised yesterday and in the matters raised today.

There is a definite link between the results of the poll and the advertising that comes out. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming) said yesterday that the government had not gone into details, it had not gone into specifics in its advertising campaign and that the advertising campaign had ceased—not that that makes any difference, and we made that point yesterday with respect to the privilege. But obviously it has not ceased because we are still being bombarded with one position, that of the Liberal government, in this debate on the constitution. Fundamentally that is wrong and fundamentally that is an abuse of the privileges of every member in this House and, indeed, an erosion of the institution. The least the government can do is to direct the Minister of State for Multiculturalism to freeze the distribution of this advertising until the Chair has made a decision on the question

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

as to whether or not there is privilege, because that, Madam Speaker, is contemptuous of your office.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I shall endeavour to be brief. It seems to me that the responses of both the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) and of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) underline the urgency of this matter. They also underline the failure on that side of the House to understand the issue.

The basis laid down by my leader in raising a question of privilege is that this place is supposed to have a certain element of equality about it in so far as debate and dealing with issues are concerned. But the moment the government starts to use taxpayers' funds, whether for the matter we were talking about yesterday or for the conducting of polls, and then says the information obtained is theirs only and not available to the other side is a denial of the rights of both sides of the House of Commons.

One of the interesting sentences in citation 1 in Beauchesne's third edition, found at page 4, is as follows:

In a close contest when the House is considering a highly controversial measure, the positions of parties are equalized: the government side may rely on its majority but the opposition is strengthened by the rules of procedure which both are bound to observe and which the Speaker must enforce.

It is understood that when the vote comes and decisions are to be made, the government has its majority and it can use it. But in a situation where we are debating matters and considering things, there is supposed to be equality, and if the Speaker leans any way, the Speaker should lean in favour of the opposition so that that equality is established. But when the Minister of Justice stands up and says that he has listened to all of the arguments and he is going to table most of the polls, but the important ones he will hold back for now because he is going to use them for making policy, we suggest that is a denial of the principle of equality on the floor of the House of Commons and it is an abuse of public funds.

Now that I am on my feet, may I interject in what I am saying to suggest that most of us in this place have a birthday every year, and although it would not be appropriate to note them all, when the government House leader has reached that age of relative wisdom, the age of 40, I think we would all like to wish him many happy returns.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: As I said in my friendly way, it is an age of relative wisdom because here on his fortieth birthday, the President of the Privy Council stands up and says it is the same thing for the government to have its paid public servants, who are sworn to certain oaths of secrecy, and so on, give them information which they may not make public, as when the government spends public money to hire private firms outside to conduct polls. I hope that by the time my friend is 50 his wisdom will be much greater than it is on this his fortieth birthday.

It seems to me that the issues we have been discussing the last few days are extremely important. I plead with you again,