

Privilege—Mr. Hnatyshyn

facts which show that members of Parliament have indeed been prevented from doing their usual work, fulfilling their duty as members and representing adequately their fellow citizens.

In the present case, there is absolutely no alleged fact which shows that members of Parliament seem to have been prevented from fulfilling their duty. On the contrary, the alleged facts have been expressly denied by the Minister of Justice. This is therefore a debate. This is what the members of the opposition want. They want a debate on the question, even though there has already been an overly lengthy debate last week on the same matter following a question raised by the Leader of the New Democratic Party. This is the second point of my argument, Madam Speaker, which shows how much the members of the Progressive Conservative Party are afraid to deal with the constitutional issue within the normal boundaries of the debate which has been going on recently. That fact is, there is already a question of privilege which has been reserved by you, Madam Speaker, on exactly the same matter which had been raised by the Leader of the New Democratic Party, and I suggest they are abusing this institution and wasting the time of Canadian taxpayers as well as of hon. members of this House. By so doing, they are showing a lack of responsibility, and if Progressive Conservative Party members take advantage of every opportunity other than the debate on the constitution to play the game of petty politics, they deserve to be denounced, and I denounce them publicly. They are seeking every possible way to prevent the debate on the constitution from progressing normally.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, they are wasting the time of the House. There is absolutely no basis for raising this question of privilege, and I say that they are showing disrespect by rising on a question of privilege which has already been reserved by you, as introduced by the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

● (1530)

[English]

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, I wish to begin by agreeing with you that what we have before the House today is very similar to a question of privilege raised on Friday and, indeed, a previous question of privilege raised in respect of government advertising on Thursday of last week.

If I may, I want to refer you to a ruling by Speaker Jerome back on December 10 last. This was referred to in the House last week by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who quoted from page 2180 of *Hansard* for that date. I should like to quote it again as follows:

The support of public funds, where applied to parliamentary activities, ought, I think, to apply across the floor of Parliament—

That was a ruling he made in respect of a different issue where the government of the day had established task forces made up of members of only one political party. The ruling was that where public funds apply, those public funds should

apply equally across the floor of the House when dealing with parliamentary activities.

What I want to suggest to you today is that we are dealing with an issue here that is as relevant, in terms of a constitutional committee, to a parliamentary activity as it was last September in relation to the task forces on grain movement, beef and so on, established by the government of the day. I think the same rule should apply here as applied at that time.

Another interesting comment made by Speaker Jerome on the same day, as reported at page 2181 of *Hansard*, is as follows:

I hope the House will take the sense of the argument, which I think is a very serious argument, and the sense of the Chair in this respect, that it is a practice which ought to be considered very carefully before it is entered into again. If it were to be attempted again, I would think the House ought to be consulted.

In other words, the House ought to be consulted before that type of activity is entered into again. One may say it was a different kind of activity because it involved task forces made up of members of only one party using public funds. I point back to what Speaker Jerome said when talking about parliamentary activity. We have before the House today a resolution on the constitution. We are not talking here at all about the substance of that resolution. We are talking about a resolution being before the House, regarding the constitution. It will establish a special committee of this House and the other place to study a document relating to the constitution. That, in my opinion, is a parliamentary activity. If the government of a previous day could not spend money for its MPs on task forces, it seems to me you can apply the same argument, that the government of the day should not have access to public funds to carry on a public opinion poll to the results of which the government alone will have access.

An hon. Member: How about paying public servants? Can we not do that?

Mr. Nystrom: The Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Blais), I believe, talks about paying civil servants.

Mr. Knowles: You don't pay them very well.

Mr. Nystrom: I want to say to him that this is a totally different argument because public servants are involved in administering programs of the government from day to day.

Mr. Knowles: And there is parliamentary approval for it.

Mr. Nystrom: They are running departments and, as my friend points out, there is parliamentary approval for that. Their jobs are defined by Parliament and we have approved them. We have passed acts, and they are administering those acts. Once Parliament has passed an act that is a totally different story. I see nothing wrong in principle with government advertising if the act has been passed and is the law of this land. What we are dealing with here today is something totally different. We are dealing with a proposal of the Government of Canada, and be it good or bad is immaterial and irrelevant, which is now a proposal of one party, a party which happens to be in the Government of Canada and which, in