

Privilege—Mr. Clark

narrow limits of parliamentary privilege. Certainly if the pollsters' publication contains any misrepresentation of members, or false, perverted or injurious reports of the proceedings of the House, such could amount to contempt. However, there is no evidence before the House of what that publication contains and, constrained as I am by the very narrow limits of parliamentary privilege, I am unable to find a *prima facie* case. The hon. member, of course, may raise this matter in other, more appropriate ways provided by our rules.

MR. CLARK—ADVERTISEMENT SPONSORED BY PUBLICATIONS CANADA

Madam Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) gave me notice yesterday of a question of privilege. I would remind the right hon. member that I have just ruled on three matters which are very closely related to what appears to be his question of privilege, as I understand it from the written notice sent to me. I must ask the right hon. member to concentrate on what he thinks constitutes a privilege and please not enter into the general debate on the three matters on which I have just ruled.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, you are quite right that your ruling now, of which I had no knowledge yesterday, does deal with one of the questions that I wanted to raise, having to do with the propriety of the Government of Canada using advertising which is designed to manipulate opinion of the public of Canada in the way it will affect debate in this House of Commons.

You have, Madam Speaker, as is appropriate, ruled narrowly on the ground of privilege. You have made it clear that it is not your position or your right in these circumstances to rule on the ground of propriety. Certainly in our judgment the question of propriety is very much open and we regard this action as an attempt to manipulate public opinion to be a most improper action.

I was interested in Your Honour's reference to the suggestion that this matter ought to be debated in the House of Commons, particularly in light of the new techniques that are now available and now being used by the government, first of all, to sample public opinions, learn public fears and then design advertising to exploit those public fears, which the Government of Canada is now doing.

I hope in light of that reference, your favourable reference to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the government might choose to make a reference to the appropriate standing committee of the House even in the absence of a finding of privilege, of this very important question which can very materially affect not only the deliberations of this House, but the ability of the people of Canada to have information from their government which they can count upon as being true information and not information designed to manipulate opinion.

There is another matter to which I wanted to turn attention yesterday. It has to do with the privileges of the Chair and the propriety of the Government of Canada acting on a question

that is under consideration by the Chair. This matter, as you indicate, was raised first by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), last Thursday. On the weekend, the Government of Canada began a series of advertisements in a range of newspapers across the country, daily, weekly, and in the ethno-cultural press, designed to cause Canadians to take their opinions about constitutional matters from a document containing clearly false statements about the constitutional matter that is before the House of Commons.

● (1220)

The narrow ground has to do with the appropriateness of the Government of Canada acting in absolute flagrant disregard for the fact that the question is under consideration by the Chair, by initiating a new series of advertisements, as I say, after the question had been raised in the House of Commons and before a decision had been rendered. I have checked to see what precedents there are in the rules of the House of Commons, and I find there are very few because this has been done so rarely that there has not been an opportunity for precedent to accumulate. I simply think this is a matter that affects the respect that must be shown the Chair and your office by hon. members of the House, including those in the government, and I think that is a matter to which it would be well for you and your officers to turn some attention.

You may recall, Madam Speaker, if I may come to the question of the narrow ground of privilege on which you found, it was our attempt last year in government to introduce a new grievance procedure in the House of Commons to allow members of Parliament to raise issues that do not fall within the strict and narrow confines of privilege but which, nonetheless, affect the capacity of the House of Commons to deal in an open and effective way with matters which were legitimate grievances.

I think there is no question at all that this deliberate use by the Government of Canada of false advertising to manipulate public opinion on a question that is before the House of Commons constitutes a very major grievance.

We had tried to introduce reforms that would allow this matter to be dealt with under the rules. This present government, having shown not as much interest in parliamentary reform, has not introduced similar reforms, so we are without remedy. We were without remedy before you on that kind of question.

There is one aspect of your ruling which I would want to consider at greater length that intrigues me, and it has to do with your finding that a case of privilege might arise if there was, indeed, a false representation of the views of members of the House of Commons.

Members of the government, most of them, are members of the House of Commons. This document "The Canadian Constitution 1980" contains information which is false. It is consequently a false representation of the position being put forward by those members of the House of Commons who are members of the government.