

specific allegation was that I sat here for a week knowing that the information I had provided to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was not correct and did nothing about it.

Surely, if I had done anything of the sort I would be at fault and I would recognize that immediately. However, I suggest to the Hon. Member that his assertion is totally without foundation. Obviously we say many things in this House. There are lots of debates and arguments, and in the course of debate we use all kinds of arguments, pro and con, with different points of view. But when I stand up in this House and speak about matters of fact, I consider myself bound not only by my oath of office as a Minister but by my oath of office as a Member of Parliament.

When I wrote to the Prime Minister on February 17, I based that information on a check of my records, on a conversation with my staff and my Deputy Minister, the former Deputy Minister of Energy, and I also requested the Department and the current Minister of Energy to provide me with all the relevant data from the files of the Department of Energy. That information has been provided to the House and it has been tabled in this House as a memorandum to the Minister dated February 16, 1983, from Mr. Tellier, the Deputy Minister of Energy.

Following this I asked the Minister of Energy to make a thorough review of all the files so that all the information would be made available. He did so, and as well the documents that were tabled by the Prime Minister on February 23 included a letter from myself and a letter from Mr. Tellier to the Minister of Energy, in which the Deputy Minister of Energy indicated quite specifically and quite categorically that he had been made aware only the night before—that is, on February 22—of the fact that further documents existed in other files which related to this particular subject, and that he was therefore writing to me, to the Prime Minister and to his Minister to inform us of this development.

Immediately upon receipt of that information I transmitted a new letter to the Prime Minister indicating to him that those new facts had been brought to my attention and that they therefore should be brought to the attention of the House, which was done.

So far from hiding anything from the House, Madam Speaker, within 24 hours, I gathered all the information I could get about this particular file and made it available to the Prime Minister, and that information served as a basis for answers by the Prime Minister. I indicated that to the best of my knowledge on February 17 I was not aware of any other discussion between parties to the Synfuels Coal Project and officials of my Department before September 3, 1981, since this was the only piece of information that was available to me either from the search of my records or the information provided by my former Department.

During the interval no further information was made available to me in spite of the fact that I had requested a thorough review of the files to be made. As soon as further

*Privilege—Mr. Lalonde*

information became available I so informed the Prime Minister, and the House was also informed.

These are the facts, Madam Speaker. I stand by those facts under my oath of office as a Minister and as a Member of Parliament, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will accept my explanation in that regard.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Erik Nielsen (Leader of the Opposition):** Madam Speaker, may I have a question?

**Madam Speaker:** Of course, the Minister knows that he did not really have a question of privilege and that surely he was using up the time to answer a question which he could not have otherwise answered during the course of the Question Period.

● (1510)

It is very difficult for the Chair not to allow a Member to reply to something, but I am afraid I have to remind the Minister, as I would any other Member, that I was right in not allowing him then to answer that question. I quote Beauchesne, Citation 359(6):

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

It is quite clear and I hope Members will remind themselves of this quotation, which only leads to orderly debate in the House.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Madam Speaker, I rise on the same question. I would have hoped the Chair would cite Citation 359 of Beauchesne at the outset of the Minister's remarks. Having cited it when he has completed his remarks, I hope it is not now going to preclude me from presenting observations with respect to those remarks.

**Madam Speaker:** I was quite conscious that there was some amount of leniency being exercised at this particular time. Because of that I will allow the Hon. Member approximately the same time to reply.

**Some Hon. Members:** No!

**Madam Speaker:** Absolutely. That is a necessity because the rule has to be applied equally to everyone. I will allow the Hon. Member to reply, but not for any longer than the Minister took. I was quite conscious that this would start a debate. However, the Minister pleaded with the House and the House seemed to have no objection, even on the other side. They were insisting that he should answer that question, so I let it go. However, it must be limited. The Hon. Member of the Opposition.

**Mr. Collenette:** On a point of order—

**Mr. Nielsen:** We are on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Collenette:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not dispute your ruling of a moment ago, but I do take great umbrage at your allowing the Leader of the Opposition