

*House of Commons*

you are unable or unwilling to do so, then there is only one course open to you, because this raises the whole question as to whether or not members who have been accused of this can any longer sit under your presidency in the chair.

**Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, I hesitated for quite some time to say anything on this question of privilege, but I think we are now beginning to generate some more heat, and I believe it would be well for me to say just a word.

I have listened very carefully to the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition, by the hon. member for Prince Albert, by the leader of the C.C.F., and others. It seems to me there are one or two things that ought to be said that have not been said, and they should be emphasized. What Your Honour wrote in your letter to Mr. Cinq-Mars has been likened by the Leader of the Opposition and others to an hon. member speaking in this house and saying the same thing about other members. It has been suggested that when an hon. member speaks in this house and says something similar to what you wrote in your letter about other hon. members you call on him to retract, and therefore that you should be called on to retract what you wrote in a personal letter.

May I suggest, Mr. Speaker, there is no relationship whatsoever in the two situations? I wonder whether it is possible that the Leader of the Opposition was implying that Your Honour has no right as a private member in this house, and in your capacity of a private member representing a constituency, to write a letter and say in that letter whatever you feel is in your own mind?

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** No.

**Mr. Low:** I wonder whether the Leader of the Opposition thinks for a moment that other hon. members of this house have not written private opinions about the distortions that took place in the pipe-line debate. I am going to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have expressed my opinion in letters just exactly as I suspect the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the C.C.F. and others have expressed in letters their private opinions about your partiality, so-called, private opinions about how you possibly leaned over backwards to favour the government, and so on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it has been suggested here that you have no right to do that. I suggest it is not a sensible piece of accusation to say that you have not that right as a private member representing a constituency. I think you have that right and I think it is your duty on occasion to write to private individuals and to express your private opinion.

Now let me go further. It has been suggested, Mr. Speaker, that it was some sort of crime or sin for you to suggest that certain members of the opposition in speaking in the pipe-line debate distorted facts for their own political purposes. I suggest that practically everything that is done in this house is done with a view to building up one's own particular political ideas and beliefs, every single thing. I might suggest, sir, that the whole course of the pipe-line debate was taken for the purpose of creating a political issue. If the facts were not distorted, certainly they were not completely placed before the house by every hon. member.

The very fact that you, Mr. Speaker, exercised your right to write a letter to a private person and in it expressed your private views certainly should not be seized upon as an excuse for again calling for the dissolution of this house and the holding of an election. I do not see that you have done anything reprehensible at all. It appears to be reprehensible in the minds of those people who are accused, of course, and I do not blame them for protesting under the circumstances, but to make a mountain out of it at this time seems to me to be very foolish.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Would the hon. member permit a question?

**Mr. Low:** Yes.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Would your remarks apply if the letter had been signed "Mr. Speaker" or was written as the Speaker of the house?

**Mr. Low:** I would think that even then he has the right to write a personal letter to anyone in his constituency or anywhere else and express his own private opinion. He is not doing it as the occupant of the chair but as the hon. member for whatever constituency he represents.

I thought I should express those points of view because it seems to me they have been suppressed by what has been said thus far. So far as we are concerned, Mr. Speaker, we want to make it abundantly clear that we feel that any member of this house who represents a constituency—whether or not at times he occupies the chair—must be granted the right to express his own private opinions in private letters and correspondence to anyone outside the house without being called to account for it in this house. If that were not so, then every single one of us would be called to account for the private letters we write and the private opinions we express in those letters and I do not think that is any business of this house at all.