

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I will defer to the Acting Minister of Justice if he wants to withdraw it.

Mr. Kaplan: Well, I do not.

Mr. Clark: He does not want to withdraw the accusation against a member of the House.

Mr. Collenette: Because he did not make one.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I just want to be clear about—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Has the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition asked the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) to withdraw his remarks?

Mr. Crombie: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: I am speaking to the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Will he repeat what he said? I did not hear it.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I indicated that I would be prepared to defer to the Acting Minister of Justice, if such he still is, if he would withdraw the accusation he made against the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie). The Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) has indicated from his seat that he does not intend to withdraw the accusation, so I will not defer to him and I will continue.

The only point I rise on is really a point of clarification. The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) indicated that he was raising a matter of privilege that we may want to pursue at a later time.

[*Translation*]

And in my opinion, it is a really important matter for the parliamentary institution. I should like to be sure that we will be in a position tomorrow or later to pursue the question raised today about the possibility for Parliament to take the word of the Liberal government, because it is fundamental to our parliamentary system. We cannot take the word of a minister in that capacity one week, if it is no longer valid the following week. Parliament would be unable to enact or implement legislation. It is a basic issue.

[*English*]

The reason we have raised the question now is that I asked in my questions to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) whether or not there was to be some new set of standards by which we would know when we can accept the word of a minister of the Crown. The Prime Minister responded in a political way, which is fair in this House, and made reference to campaign promises which might be departed from, such as the opposition he once articulated to the imposition of wage and price controls. It is one thing when a party leader and a party abandon or reverse themselves, as they did on the question of wage and price controls. It is quite another thing when a minister of the Crown—sworn to oath as a minister to tell the truth and to speak for the government and sent before a

parliamentary committee to steer a bill through that committee on behalf of the government—serving as an acting minister of the Crown and authorized by order in council, gives representations on which members of Parliament act. Without getting into the specific deliberations of the committee, that is what happened.

A representation was given by the minister on behalf of the government, after he had been introduced as the spokesman of the government and the Acting Minister of Justice. There was a response to that; it changed the behaviour of members of the House of Commons serving in the committee. We accepted his word and we were misled. Madam Speaker, that is precisely what happened. It raises the question now as to when the word of any minister of the Crown is word that the House of Commons can accept.

● (1520)

When will we be faced again with a situation where something is said on Thursday or Friday and then repudiated on Monday night as a result of deliberations, pressures, we know not what, having to do with perhaps other parties, the New Democratic Party and its alliance with the Liberals? Perhaps there were other pressures which were brought to bear. This House cannot function, Madam Speaker, unless we can accept that ministers of the Crown speak the truth, speak for the government when they are guiding matters of government business through a committee of the House of Commons. We cannot function now in a situation such as has been created by the repudiation by the Prime Minister of the Solicitor General in his capacity as Acting Minister of Justice.

The question does not stop here, Madam Speaker. My colleague from Nepean-Carleton raised a very good point when responding to the House business announcement and the request by the government House leader for the agreement of this whole chamber to designate Thursday as a day when we can proceed with the access to information legislation. We voted on that quickly. But will there be a repudiation of what the government House leader said? We have before the House of Commons now, and again in committee—I will only deal with the dispatch of business to that committee by this Parliament—bills and very important legislation dealing with oil and gas matters in this country. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) appears, speaking for the government, before that committee. He gives testimony. Can we believe him? Can we believe what he says? When we vote on a particular bill and go through it clause by clause, can we be sure that the statements made by the minister, which cause members of Parliament to vote one way, will not be repudiated the day after? That is the question which is before us.

We now have had a shadow passed over the capacity of this House to believe the word of a minister of the Crown. And it is not simply a question of one man's reputation, although that is always at stake here. It is a question of the ability of this Parliament to work and to function. We cannot function if one minister speaking for the government one day says one thing, and another minister, speaking on the same question for the