

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

be getting up again on a point of order because the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition has not yet uttered a word since he raised the first point. He cannot have found a point of order in anything which the Leader of the Opposition might have said.

I would ask the hon. member for Scarborough Centre to resume his seat so as to allow the Leader of the Opposition to express himself. If the hon. member wants to participate in the debate, he can do it later on.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I regret this matter is taking so much time of the House. But the point I was making is that we are now in an age where there are sophisticated and very powerful new methods of influencing opinion. What they involve is a marriage of public opinion polls with high-powered advertising campaigns. We have seen that work in election campaigns. We know who the pollsters were for the Liberal party. We know they are the same pollsters for the Government of Canada now. We know who the advertising agents were for the Liberal party. We know they are the same advertising agents as are used for many of the advertisements to which objection is being taken here. There is a purpose to this new sophisticated kind of marriage of public opinion polls to try to determine where the public is vulnerable and advertising campaigns designed to effect a message which will hit the public where it is vulnerable.

How does that affect the rights of the House of Commons of Canada? Naturally, this House is sensitive and conducts its debates with some sensitivity to public opinion in the country. We are here to serve a public. It is the grave fear of members on this side that these sophisticated new techniques are being used in an organized way by a minister charged specifically with that responsibility, to try to condition public opinion prior to a matter of substance and of importance being discussed and being decided here on the floor of the House of Commons. That, as my colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn), attempted to indicate, imposes an entirely different environment and circumstance upon this House.

It may be to some degree that those changes that occur in public opinion are beyond the control of Parliament. What we are pointing to here is that there is a deliberate attempt being made by the Government of Canada to use these modern techniques of persuasion to create a public opinion that will be friendly to their positions, and hostile to the positions of their critics on the floor of the House of Commons. In other words, they are using public money to try to reach beyond Parliament to limit the freedom and the capacity of Parliament to come to decisions on basic and fundamental questions here.

In many cases, the advertising used is designed not to inform the public of Canada but to misinform the public of Canada. As I look at some of the advertising here, which talks about making the constitution right, making the constitution work and making the constitution ours, there is no question that that is an appeal to patriotism, an appeal to the pride which Canadians have in their country, and an attempt, a subtle, not very well disguised attempt, to suggest the legislation that will follow from that advertising campaign will be limited simply to

the question of bringing the constitution home. That, Madam Speaker, is misinformation. That is false information.

The legislation which the public was conditioned by this advertising to expect was simply patriation of the constitution. But instead of receiving what they were conditioned to expect, the public of Canada has been presented here with a resolution which goes well beyond the laudable goal of patriation, which would, among other things, affect, in a way the Supreme Court declared illegal, the powers of the other place and establish a double standard of amendment: one standard for the Liberal government's amendments, and subsequent standards for all other amendments of interest to other Canadians. This will build into the law of Canada a capacity for any majority government to ignore the provincial governments and the legislatures of the land. In other words, there has been an attempt made to create among Canadians the impression that we were dealing with a limited question here, a question which struck at the heart and spoke only of the location of the Canadian constitution. Instead, after the softening up by the Government of Canada, there was a very different piece of legislation brought in.

As I say, it is very difficult for the Chair or for any members of this House to know exactly how we should respond to new developments in technology. It took our predecessor Houses some time and some discussion to determine what we would do about the so-called fourth estate; whether we would allow journalists in the gallery; whether we would allow that presence to change the traditional proceedings. There was extensive debate and extensive consultation among all parties before it was decided to allow television to take its place and to have cameras here on the floor of the House of Commons.

What I am suggesting is that there is now a new medium, a new instrument of persuasion of which use is being made by the government to try to create a climate, to try to manipulate public opinion which will set the context in which Parliament must decide. I suggest very briefly that that affects the fundamental and traditional freedoms of the Parliament of Canada to make decisions. I think that that attempt to spend public money, to manipulate public opinion on public questions that have not yet been decided, is an improper practice that offends the rights of this House of Commons.

That, in my view, is one of the questions of substance which your Honour will have to decide, along with the question of substance having to do with the quite precise definition of approval in principle as it applies to decisions taken by the House of Commons of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1550)

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I shall do my best to meet the suggestion which you made some time ago, namely, that we address ourselves to the question of privilege itself. In other words, it is not yours to take part in the matters of substance that are being debated back and forth. However, in order for Your Honour to allow