

House will realize that there was nothing done to deliberately mislead the House at all.”

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, the House of Commons is recognized as an institution that respects its members. When the Leader of the Opposition asked me the question, I was not particularly aggressive. In any case, I thrive on aggressive questions and I enjoy Parliament. I have spent nineteen years in the House, and I am very fond of parliamentary debate. I certainly never run away from a debate. So if I had wanted to start a debate at three minutes to three—it takes time for the Leader of the Opposition to make up his mind to ask a question—at three to three I might have tried to engage in a little skirmish with the Leader of the Opposition. However, I merely said: The decision has not been finalized. That is clearly what was in my mind. I then continued consultations with my department and my colleagues, and at the end of the afternoon, I decided to go to Newfoundland, and the order in council was passed Wednesday morning.

I am not going to split hairs about the exact instant of legality and all that, but that is what happened. I had no intention of doing anything that would be in contempt of the House. Today, Madam Speaker, I could actually rise on two questions of privilege before this House, if I really wanted to make a nuisance of myself as some people do occasionally. The hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) accused me just now of having given the letter to the press before it reached Mr. Peckford. That is not true. I did not even have the damned letter. Excuse me, Madam Speaker, I withdraw that word. I did not have the letter. I could accuse the hon. member for St. John's West and like him, do nothing but talk, talk, talk, and I could do it but it is really not worth it. I did not have the letter.

Furthermore, the hon. member accused me of having refused to see Mr. Ottenheimer, which is totally ridiculous, since Mr. Ottenheimer himself cancelled the meeting. I did not have to see him, but I felt that although it was a difficult situation, it was my duty, on arriving in St. John's, to try to meet my colleague Mr. Ottenheimer in order to explain to him personally why we were proceeding in this way and during our meeting perhaps try to find a way to settle the problem. We have heard any number of speeches on certain issues, as the House will recall. I would rather not look back, but hon. members are aware that we have had incredible arguments about the Constitution in the House and with the Newfoundland government. And we managed to settle our differences. Perhaps this is going to help speed up the process of finding a solution. I hope so, but it does not mean that I wanted to lie to the House and break the rules of Parliament. It does not make sense. This is ridiculous. It is really childish. Today we have not heard a single question on the substance of what we have done.

*Privilege—Mr. Crosbie*

• (1610)

[*English*]

A member of the opposition wanted to know why we had done it, if there was any reason to do that.

**Mr. Clark:** We cannot believe what you say.

**Mr. Chrétien:** Joe, come on!

**An hon. Member:** Come on again.

**Mr. Chrétien:** Joe, I said there was no final decision. The hon. member—

**Mr. Clark:** You did not say that. You did not say that. That is a lie.

**Mr. Chrétien:** Joe, I just say—Madam Speaker, it is quite clear that I have been very candid this afternoon with the House of Commons.

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

**Mr. Chrétien:** I have been candid. I said exactly what happened. They can laugh if they want to; I am not impressed at all. I just say that yesterday—on Tuesday—I did not mislead the House. I had no intention of doing that. I said what was in my mind and is still in my mind, just the plain truth.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Chrétien:** I have some obligations to my colleagues. When they authorize you to do something and they say, “You do that when you meet certain conditions”, in my mind, until the conditions are met, it is not authorized.

**An hon. Member:** Right on!

**Mr. Chrétien:** It is the basic principle of cabinet solidarity—

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

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Chrétien:** —that you respect the decision of the cabinet.

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

**Mr. Chrétien:** That is exactly what I have done. Madam Speaker, if I look at the question of legality, there are a lot of people on the other side who have been members of the Privy Council. You yourself, Madam Speaker, have been a member. Of course, at times, before the moment that there is a conditional decision made by the cabinet and an order in council, there is some change. The legal decision is made when the order in council is passed.

**Mr. Clark:** You did not say the “legal”.

**Mr. Chrétien:** I could have just sat back on that today. The facts are there. Nobody can say that the order in council was not delivered, and signed too, signed by the Deputy Governor