

Routine Proceedings

The current controversy springs from events of September 23, 1990. On September 23, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie made another statement outside this Chamber expressing his loyalty to the people of Québec. This statement, as the hon. member for Shefford has pointed out, is very similar to one of two oaths taken by members of the National Assembly of Québec. The hon. member for Shefford sees no contradiction there. He argues, “—l’un n’empêche pas l’autre.”

• (1110)

But this viewpoint is not universally shared. Others contend—contentions that have been fueled by media reports and commentary—that the events of September 23 cast doubt on the legitimacy of the oath taken August 27.

[*English*]

Your Speaker is not empowered to make a judgment on the circumstances or the sincerity with which a duly elected member takes the oath of allegiance. The significance of the oath to each member is a matter of conscience and so it must remain.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie has stated very clearly in the House that he has in no way repudiated the oath of allegiance he took on August 27. The hon. member said:

[*Translation*]

I never mocked the Canadian Parliament nor the Queen. I swore the oath of allegiance with all due regard for the democratic institution that the Canadian Parliament is.

[*English*]

Whatever construction the media has put on the situation, whatever the perception or misperception of the events of September 23, it is a fundamental principle and long-established convention of the House to accept as true the word of an hon. member. The Chair must therefore conclude that there has been no breach of privilege as contempt.

[*Translation*]

That being said, it is important to view this situation in its entirety. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Ma-

rie has been unambiguous on his perspective and that of his colleagues:

We insisted that it is with the outmost respect for Canadian Parliamentary institutions that we are sitting here, while insisting that we would strive to achieve Quebec's sovereignty as soon as possible.

[*English*]

As the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond has eloquently stated, the fact that an hon. member holds views which are vigorously opposed by other hon. members can in no sense be allowed to detract from his right to present them.

A historical perspective on parliament here in Canada and in Great Britain reveals ample precedent for the presence in the House of duly elected members whose ultimate goal may be at odds with, even inimical to, the constitutional *status quo*.

Only the House can examine the conduct of its members and only the House can take action if it decides action is required. Should the House decide that an hon. member has in some way committed a contempt, then it is for the House to take the appropriate steps.

The Chair wishes to thank all hon. members who participated in the discussion of these important matters. The freedom of all members of the House to represent their constituents and to perform their duties is a cherished right. The Chair hopes that the airing of these issues has helped to clarify the situation so that the work of the House can carry on in the best traditions of this place. I thank hon. members.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government responses to 36 petitions.

[*Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.*]