

this country by a commercial company which is offering the information for sale for private gain to its customers.

What my colleague from Saskatoon West has asked is how we can possibly determine whether this is the case or not as long as Parliament is being refused access to the information. As long as we do not know what is in those polls which tax dollars have financed, there is no way we can make this comparison. We are not able to decide whether in fact Mr. Goldfarb is selling information which was paid for by the taxpayers for use by the Government of Canada. If, indeed, Mr. Goldfarb is selling such information for private gain, it would constitute, in my opinion, a very clear breach of the privileges of members of Parliament to have them be denied by the government, on whatever grounds, access to this information.

At the present time, Madam Speaker, you are taking under advisement a question of privilege that was raised on Friday. You are looking at the whole question of whether it is proper that public opinion in Canada should be classified. Only this government would feel it had the right to classify public opinion and treat it as something secret, and treat the results of studies carried out at the expense of the taxpayers of Canada as materials to which it alone should be privy, and Parliament and the people of Canada should not have access.

At the same time I would like to mention, arising out of the remarks of the Minister of Justice in the House today when he commented on the question of the release of polls, that the Minister of Justice misleads the House, I hope unintentionally, when he indicates, if that was the implication of what he was saying, that there was a policy when we were in government of withholding information gained through polls paid for by the taxpayer. In co-operation with my colleague from Joliette I was the minister who had responsibility for co-ordinating the government's activities on advertising and upon public opinion research. I can indicate to the House that our government's policy from the outset was that any poll paid for by the taxpayer should be made freely available to the people of Canada.

**Mr. Ouellet:** How many polls did you release?

**Mr. Beatty:** I say to the minister that we did not believe it was necessary to even enunciate a principle that should be so straight forward, that you do not classify public opinion polls paid for by tax dollars. These are matters which belong to the people of Canada.

I want to indicate to the government, as strenuously as I can, that if any of these polls which are being withheld by the government were taken during our tenure in office, I call upon the government today to release those polls. In doing that, I do so with the support of my leader. I invite members opposite to indicate if any of them at any time during our tenure in office requested these polls and were refused, because the policy was clear from the outset, that every single poll of this sort financed by tax dollars would be made available to the people of Canada, and certainly to the Parliament of Canada. If they have changed that policy and are classifying public opinion

polls, and in particular any that were paid for during our tenure in office, they have the responsibility to declassify them and make them available to Parliament and the public as soon as possible.

Let me return to the point you asked me to deal with, Madam Speaker. This is a very serious breach of the privileges of members of Parliament if tax dollars are used to develop public opinion polls and then those polls are classified and withheld from the Parliament of Canada at the time when they are critical for a debate which is taking place in Parliament this very day. If they are withheld from us, they are withheld from the people of Canada by the government, but this can be achieved through the backdoor by paying money to Martin Goldfarb, subscribing to his Goldfarb report for which he is taking full-page ads to try to sell. He points out in there that he has done extensive work for the Government of Canada.

The only way in which you, Madam Speaker, and members of this House, can make an informed judgment as to whether there has been a very serious breach of the privileges of members of the House of Commons is if the government is required to declassify those public opinion polls which they are keeping secret at the present time. That must be done.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, this is a good example of the lack of interest of Progressive Conservatives in the constitutional debate. Every excuse and every means, even if they show a complete lack of respect toward the population and toward Parliament, seem to them completely justifiable to raise a matter which certainly does not constitute grounds for a question of privilege. What the hon. member has just stated and suggested is the complete opposite of what the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) said today in replying to certain questions. As you will see, the whole issue concerns a difference of opinions about the facts. How then can anyone conclude that the privileges of the members of Parliament are affected if, basically, the facts that should have been proven to your satisfaction, Madam Speaker, are denied on this side of the House?

Obviously, the member who spoke before the last speaker tried to give you a procedural lesson by saying, "Do not be afraid, all you have to do is to say that we are right and decide whether or not there is a prima facie question of privilege, and it will be up to the committee to examine the whole matter and determine whether you are right or not." I am sorry, but this is not procedurally correct. The hon. member was wrong. According to the procedure, you must decide, in light of the facts which are stated, whether there is a prima facie question of privilege. However, it is the House of Commons as a whole which must decide whether or not there is a question of privilege.

For you to conclude that there is a prima facie question of privilege, Madam Speaker, you need some facts. It is not just a matter of stating high principles. These must be supported by