

**Mr. Clark:** I thank the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi for returning to his responsibility.

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

**Mr. Clark:** I direct my question to him as chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport. Will the chairman of that committee tell us whether he has asked for a reference of the VIA Rail question to the standing committee, and whether he has asked for authority to call officials of the railways, VIA Rail or of the Canadian Transport Commission, or any other group who might be able to help the House of Commons come to the truth about the VIA Rail decision? Has he sought that reference?

*And Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi) and Mr. Pinard having risen:*

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

**Some hon. Members:** Sit down, Pinard.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**An hon. Member:** Now we know who runs the committees.

**An hon. Member:** Show some courage. You can let the man speak.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, this question has already been asked. We made it quite clear that although the suggestion seemed to have some merit, we had to consider the fact that this matter had already been debated at least twice. Members will recall that starting with the first designated day, it was the subject of a motion introduced by the opposition, which even led to a vote of non-confidence in the government. The matter was debated all day, followed by a vote in the House, and subsequently we had a surprise motion for concurrence in a committee report on the subject. This matter was debated for a whole day, on Monday this week, on government time, and now, as I said before, there are still four opposition days before December 10, so that if the opposition wants to discuss the question again, we shall have no choice but to reopen the debate.

However, Madam Speaker, the question asked by the opposition leader could not be answered otherwise, because even if the committee did have the reference order, in the final instance this can lead to debate in the House and could therefore upset the government's priorities.

[*English*]

#### POSITION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition):** Madam Speaker, there is a very real question affecting the basic rules of this House of Commons and the propriety of conduct here as to whether a minister of the Crown can force an elected

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chairman of a standing committee of this House of Commons to sink to his knees and seek safety in his seat.

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

**Mr. Clark:** We will pursue that affront to democracy later.

I would like to ask the member for Northumberland-Miramichi, in his capacity as chairman, does he intend to sit quietly in his seat and be gagged by the President of the Privy Council, or will he accept his responsibility and stand up and tell this House whether he has sought the reference and sought the authority I asked him about?

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

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Madam Speaker—

**Mr. Pinard:** *Madame le Président*—

**Some hon. Members:** Come on, let him speak.

**An hon. Member:** What kind of a democracy is this?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, I am sure that the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi is now able to answer the Leader of the Opposition and tell him that he does not need his lessons in democracy.

[*English*]

**Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Madam Speaker, first of all I do not sink to my knees for anyone except my God.

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** He is not here today. He will be back tomorrow.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** The answer to the right hon. gentleman's question is yes.

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

#### REASONS FOR MINISTER'S ACTIONS

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition):** Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Transport. We have an indication that this minister, who went around the rules of the CTC—

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

**An hon. Member:** Withdraw!

**Mr. Clark:** —to deny the Canadian Transport Commission the right to hold its hearings on the VIA Rail procedures, has now apparently used his authority to deny a request by the