

*Privilege—Mr. Crosbie*

**Mr. Chrétien:** Madam Speaker, I do not know why the hon. member becomes exercised, makes a big fuss and tries to be a little *bouffant* as he did yesterday, because the facts themselves today just prove what is the problem. I would like very clearly to say that when I answered the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) in the House on Tuesday, I stated the truth. There was this problem concerning the offshore which has been in front of the cabinet for a long time. The hon. member knows that some months ago I communicated with the minister of justice in Newfoundland, Mr. Ottenheimer, and suggested that we go directly to the Supreme Court in order to shorten the process and make sure that there was a decision. There was an election, and so on, so the decision was not made. There were discussions, there were some procedures which had to be followed, and the matter was reviewed from time to time.

Therefore, when I rose in the House on Tuesday afternoon it was one of the plans, and we had obviously been ready for a long time because all of the documents were ready. I hope the opposition will not start to blame a minister because he does his work properly and gets ready to act when the time comes. So I was ready, and I came to the House. The Leader of the Opposition asked me a question and I said there was no final decision, and it was confirmed—

**Mr. Clark:** No decision at all; don't weasel.

**Mr. Chrétien:** No decision, yes, were the words I used. So, no decision was made. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) very clearly described it. There was a decision which had been made with some conditions attached. Of course, I did not want to mislead the House. I just said that there was no decision because some conditions had to be met.

In the afternoon when I left this House at three o'clock and went back to the cabinet—because the cabinet was sitting—I had to entertain some more discussions, with my officials and with some ministers and, by the end of the afternoon, I was satisfied that I could proceed. But by that time it was around seven o'clock.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Making it worse.

**Mr. Chrétien:** So the order in council could not be passed until the morning after. Because no one was in their office, I gave instructions for the processing of the order in council only in the morning. In fact, the order in council was passed at ten o'clock on Wednesday morning by the Deputy Governor General.

I did not want to mislead the House. There was no final decision. The hon. member said that I purposely wanted to mislead the House. Yesterday he misled the House, and I am sure it was involuntary, because he rose in the House and he said:

Today the Minister of Justice met with the leader of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland . . . rather than with the minister of justice for Newfoundland. He refused to meet with the minister of justice—

I do not say that the hon. member wanted to mislead the House, but that is, in fact, what he has done, because I left on Wednesday morning and I had given instructions on Tuesday

night to make an appointment for me with Mr. Ottenheimer. His office was called. When I arrived in St. John's, I asked my assistant to call the office of Mr. Ottenheimer. Mr. Ottenheimer agreed to meet me at 3.30 in the afternoon. Later on he called and cancelled the meeting.

The hon. member for St. John's West accused me of refusing to meet Mr. Ottenheimer.

**Mr. McGrath:** Before the press conference!

**Mr. Chrétien:** I did not call him to cancel the meeting. He did not attach any condition. I went there and informed him that I was in St. John's and that I wanted to have a meeting. I did not personally talk to him. A time was set for 3.30. I have worked with Mr. Ottenheimer for years. I have no grievance against him. We might disagree, but I respect him as the attorney-general and I wanted to see him. But he cancelled the meeting.

I do not say that the hon. member for St. John's West wanted to mislead the House of Commons. He probably interpreted that the meeting had been cancelled, or perhaps he was not even aware that the meeting had been agreed upon. So he said the same thing this afternoon. What was his intention a minute ago? He withdrew what he said. He said that I was there, giving the letter of the Prime Minister to the press, before the Premier of Newfoundland had received the letter. I am sorry, I did not have the letter. The letter was sent by the Prime Minister to Mr. Peckford. I was not a messenger. I do not say that the hon. member wanted to deliberately mislead the House, but he did not state the truth, because I did not have the letter.

When we are debating in the House and replying to questions, I think it should be understood that if I had been satisfied when I rose in my seat that there was a decision, and that I was to proceed the same day, the day after, or Wednesday, if I had been sure I would have said so. I have been a member of this House for 19 years, 15 years in the cabinet. I have always dealt with the House on a reasonable basis. I know that there are some affirmations made on a daily basis which are sometimes contradictory.

The hon. member for St. John's West tries to define when a decision has been made. I am telling hon. members that, in my own mind, there was no final decision because I had to meet certain conditions. If these conditions had not been met in the afternoon, I would not have been in Newfoundland the day after. I would have had to wait and perhaps would never have gone. I am not privileged to discuss what goes on in the cabinet, nor why I was not ready to proceed. That is part of cabinet confidentiality. Hon. members have been here long enough to realize that there is some constraint when one is in the cabinet. I just say that I stated the situation as it existed in my mind. I did not want to mislead anyone.

I was surprised at the hon. member yesterday, because when I heard about what he said, I said I found it a bit ridiculous. I said: "It is too bad I am not there because the members of the