

Speaker, I suggest that the hon. member's question of privilege is based on a misreading of the facts, a misunderstanding of the situation, and I do not think it is relevant to the question before us.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton) on the same question of privilege.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, on the same question of privilege, the statute that governs this matter is the National Energy Board Act. That act makes very clear that the National Energy Board is responsible for advising the government as well as performing a regulatory function. Here we have a report brought in by the minister, through civil servants in his department, which ignores the existing legislation which gives this responsibility to the National Energy Board. I think the question of whether the government is ignoring the National Energy Board Act by bringing in a report, not through the National Energy Board, the agency set up by parliament to do so, but through some section in the minister's own department, is an important matter affecting the privileges of this House.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to deal directly with the specific instance raised by the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies); I believe that has been dealt with effectively by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie). However, I do want to react positively to the general concern that he has expressed in his statement about the situation in parliament, and particularly about the image which parliament frequently has at the present time of not dealing with relevant events.

● (1210)

The right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) on more than one occasion has outlined the necessity of having a debate, for example, on the subject of external affairs. It would have been useful in recent weeks if it had been possible in the House of Commons to deal with the question of human rights which is attracting the concern of certain people in many countries of the world. There are other issues that can be debated in the House, including energy issues, and questions of national unity, which will become more important as time goes on, and thus the House and its debates would appear much more relevant to us and to the people at large.

There is no question, at the present time, that our debates are becoming not only irrelevant to the people of Canada but irrelevant to the members of the House of Commons. I have observed the situation in the chamber since I came back to this job last fall. As I observed the situation, there is a malaise, a sense of boredom and a sense of drift among members of parliament with respect to the debates that take place in this chamber.

When the hon. member for Don Valley makes the general plea that we ought to do something to make our operations more relevant and more meaningful, I support him very much.

Privilege—Mr. Gillies

His plea was sincere and made from the heart. I hope that before this session is over all hon. members will understand what we are doing to this institution in the way we conduct our business.

An hon. Member: I think it is time for an election.

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I think the remarks of the government House leader and some of the implications of what he said should not remain unanswered. It seems to me that all of us in this House and, I know, members of our party in the tradition of the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) have very high regard for the institution of parliament. It seems to me that any suggestion that there is a panacea which is available, aside from the organization of affairs on the part of the government with respect to its legislative program, is doing a disservice to this institution—

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: —and is suggesting that there is a magic wand that may be waved. I simply make the point with respect to this issue that if the House leader of the government is in fact interested in bringing some relevance to the House of Commons, he should listen with sympathy to the suggestion made by my colleague, the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies), and encourage ministers, including the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang), to be present in the House of Commons to make major statements with respect to changes of policy in this chamber, and not before the television cameras.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague in fact has moved a specific and constructive motion to have this whole matter directed to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. It would be an ideal opportunity for members of that committee, in the spirit of mutual respect that we have for parliament, to look at the over-all question of statements made by ministers, major amendments and the utilization of the rules in this respect. I think the suggestion made by my colleague is eminently sensible, and the government House leader, by his remarks, clearly indicates support of the motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) is, of course, not a new one. It was raised recently in connection with statements made outside the House by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) respecting changes in transportation policy. This happens whenever a statement is made or a press conference is held by a minister in respect of matters of that sort.

The intervention of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) gave an indication of the difficulty of attempting to frame any kind of rule which would have an intelligent application to these circumstances. It is evident, in this situation, that there is disagreement as to whether it was a