

that we have a situation where a minister of the Crown has been nominated by the government party to serve on a parliamentary joint committee. This is a breach of all traditions and practices of the House of Commons because that minister, by virtue of his oath and by virtue of being a member of the cabinet of Canada, is not able to participate in that committee discussion with the same freedom of action as other members of the House of Commons or of the Senate who are members of that committee. There is a clear change in the practice of the House.

Obviously it must have been taken with the knowledge of the government House leader who is a member of cabinet and is a colleague of not only the minister who was named but of the other ministers in that place who, presumably, took part in that decision. What troubles me and causes me to rise at this time is that this marks at least the second time in, I think, ten days where the minister responsible to the House of Commons on government business has declined to accept responsibility for statements of a ministerial colleague in the House of Commons or has declined to tell the House of Commons whether a statement made in the other place in fact represents the position of the Government of Canada. Why has he declined that? It is because the other minister is not here. That is simply not acceptable to the House of Commons.

**Some hon. Members:** Right on.

**Mr. Clark:** It is simply not acceptable that we are denied an indication or a statement from the mouth of the government House leader here in the House of Commons as to what is the position of the Government of Canada when a position has been stated by a cabinet colleague in the other place, and it is neither confirmed nor denied by the government House leader here. There is a dangerous new practice which is developing here. First of all, it is dangerous in its attempt to smuggle a person to a joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate, who is not free to act independently in the way other members are. Secondly, it is a dangerous practice in that the repeated refusals of this government House leader to accept the principle of government solidarity, to accept the principle of cabinet solidarity, and to accept that ministerial responsibility means that a statement made by one of his colleagues must bind the government, or, if it does not, it must be specifically rejected and disclaimed by the responsible government House leader here in the House of Commons.

● (1520)

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

[*Translation*]

**Madam Speaker:** Before recognizing another member, I should remind those who have risen on this point of order that I find myself in an absolutely impossible situation because I cannot rule on this matter since I am bound only by the rules of this House. What goes on in the Senate is therefore the affair of the Speaker of that assembly.

*Point of Order—Mr. Clark*

The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition has initiated a discussion because he has not had an answer from the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) about something which was discussed in the Senate. He may quite legitimately try to obtain an answer to his question, but this is a debate and we are in fact having a debate. This is not a point of order. Therefore, since it is not a point of order, I admit that there can be a debate, but there are other occasions when we have such debates in the House of Commons and I am certain that the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition will take the first opportunity to have one. I shall now recognize the President of the Privy Council as he has been asked a direct question, but I cannot recognize other members on this point of order.

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, there is no reason for the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition to panic. In fact, I do not know whether there will be a minister among the members of the joint committee, but it would not be the first time that this has happened. I can give him a list of members of a committee and even of chairmen of committees who were ministers at the time. Not so long ago, in 1976-77, Madam Speaker, Mr. Sharp was the chairman of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. The present Minister of Finance has served as chairman of a committee, as did Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir John A. Macdonald.

I therefore do not see why the right hon. member should be shocked by what happened in the Senate yesterday or by the attempt to have a minister appointed to a joint committee. I do not see how this can go against all the precedents. I believe that the right hon. member should check on his facts and perhaps learn a bit more about parliamentary procedure and the practices of this House and of this noble institution for which we all have the highest respect. Therefore, there is no reason to panic. If it did happen, it would not be the first time. That would not be a precedent because it has happened before that a minister has been appointed to sit on a committee. I am not saying that one would be appointed again this time, for I do not intend to interfere with the senators' choice. I leave them entirely free to appoint whomever they please to sit on this joint committee. I repeat, Madam Speaker, on what senators may say in the other place, I assume that there are Progressive Conservative senators there to ask relevant questions.

As far as our position is concerned—I can repeat to the Leader of the Opposition what I said earlier to the NDP member—it is clearly that we want to honour the decision which has been reached by both the House of Commons and the Senate concerning the mandate entrusted to the Joint Committee: first, to consider the joint resolution, and second, to submit its report not later than December 9. I suggest that things could not be clearer, and if the Leader of the Opposition does not understand, I am sorry, but there is nothing I can add. I repeat, therefore, what I have just said, Madam Speak-