

Privilege—Mr. Clark

Members on this side have pointed out that we have a responsibility toward the people of Canada, certainly toward our constituents, to explain to them the profound new policy announced by the government which becomes effective tonight, and which according to the government House leader Parliament should not have a chance to talk about before we go home for the weekend.

All the Leader of the Opposition did when he got up to intervene was to ask for a statement from the minister, which would have taken a minute at most, yet the government House leader, as the minister of energy was getting up to give that statement, jumped up to cut him off and prevent the minister from making that statement. I am sure that the government House leader's motives were honourable and that all he wanted to do was to expedite the proceedings in the House. But I say to him that the proceedings in the House would have gone on at a much more rapid and expeditious pace if he had shown that courtesy to Parliament and if he had been prepared to allow that brief statement to be made.

Mr. Nielsen: Parliament is a nuisance to them.

Mr. Beatty: At the very same time as the minister was tabling his notice of motion in the House of Commons, his officials were releasing a press release in the gallery which gave the substance of what we wanted to know. What was it that the minister was doing there? What was the purpose of this new policy? What would be the effect upon the Canadian people? Surely if Parliament is to have any function at all, it is essential that Parliament be entitled to have the same information which is made freely available by the flacks on the minister's staff to the press gallery and to other groups outside of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: Madam Speaker, indeed, no rule of the House of Commons compels courtesy on the part of any member of Parliament, and certainly not on the part of the Crown. But common sense, parliamentary tradition and the need to have some respect for the people of Canada and for the representatives of the people of Canada should compel every minister of the Crown to treat the House of Commons with the same sort of courtesy which they would expect if they were on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order which I hope will make your task easier. We are at the stage of notices of motions. I tabled the motion and I understand, and the other parties recognize as far as I can see, that it was correct and proper to do that. Once we reach "statements by ministers", if it helps the House I will be ready and available to answer questions. I submit that under this question of privilege we have covered a lot of the substance of the matter, but if there are further questions to be asked, then I will be available and will be happy to expedite matters by answering

any questions that may be raised, so far as I can answer them, when we reach "statements by ministers".

● (1430)

I submit that there is no question of privilege here as such, Madam Speaker, but I am ready to help the House proceed and will be available when we reach "statements by ministers".

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I will be very brief on the point of order raised by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I am delighted that he has accepted the suggestion I made an hour and a half of parliamentary time ago. The only question in my mind is what bloody-mindedness in the head of the government House leader, what motives on the side of the government, caused them to waste an hour and a half of the time of Parliament before acceding to this simple request.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) is unwilling to take a good lesson of parliamentary courtesy. Indeed, the time lost was used by his party, and I feel that the time taken up to now was to obtain some explanation from the minister who had the opportunity to speak on this boring question of privilege, who answered questions already put by some members opposite and who is trying to straighten things out, because actually, the Leader of the Official Opposition has enough experience to realize that what was going on was not so much a debate on a question of privilege as questions put to the minister.

The minister merely wanted to straighten things out and co-operate by answering more specific questions, if any, during the last hour and a half. I have much more respect for the members of his party than he has shown today. I do not consider that time has been wasted. They have made their point and explained what they had in mind, and questions have been put. That will spare the minister having to make a statement of an hour and a half. In fact, there is no reason why this debate should last more than a few minutes after the minister has expressed his views and answered a few questions.

To my mind, what we are doing right now is demonstrating that we can be courteous, as the Leader of the Official Opposition wanted us to be, that we have respected our rules, and that if the time spent on discussing the matter, which the Leader of the Official Opposition qualified as time wasted, was indeed wasted, then his party is responsible for it because, as far as we are concerned, time spent on the energy question is not time wasted, it is important time.

[*English*]

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, as I understood the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, he said he was prepared to make a statement and answer questions if this was the wish of the House.