

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

have the right to discuss, it is the very existence of this country and this parliament. I submit, therefore, that there is a prima facie question of privilege.

Reference has been made time and time again to what Your Honour's predecessor said, and what you have said, about a matter of dispute or grievance not being a question of privilege unless it is based on something which infringes on the capacity of members of parliament to do their job. One of the jobs about which all of us in all parties, are concerned is to hold this country together. That issue has been brought before us, and I suggest the place for that to be discussed is here on the floor of this House. I, therefore, reject all the spurious arguments of the Prime Minister and his suggestion that there have been opportunities to ask questions and all that; but so far as the procedural question is concerned, the fact is, as my leader put it, that our rights have been infringed upon.

I believe this is a serious matter and one in respect of which there is no precedent in the history of this parliament. I think Your Honour should find there is a prima facie case of privilege, and decide that we ought to have the right to debate and discuss the proposition that before the Prime Minister goes on television he should make a statement on this issue here on the floor of the House of Commons, not later than tomorrow prior to his public appearance tomorrow night.

[Translation]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with the previous speakers, but may I make the following point. It is quite obvious that even though it is maintained that Quebec is like any other province, facts show quite clearly that when something happens there people realize that that province is not quite like any other.

Mr. Speaker, I think furthermore that the attitude of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau)—the fact, for example, that he has left the House, his arrogant behaviour after the almost ridiculous statements he made right after the election which we are now discussing—shows how anti-democratic he is and that it is about time we came back to certain parliamentary principles. It is quite obvious that if the Prime Minister refuses to endorse the motion introduced by the leader of the New Democratic Party, it is because he seems to fear some reactions even from the elected representatives.

I do not think that as an existing parliament we can bear such an attitude from the Prime Minister and the government. True, it is a serious question and we must know specifically the intentions of the government, as I said during the question period. I already foresee the rather unorthodox steps which will be taken to thwart the eventual yearnings of Quebec as a result of the government elected on November 15 last.

Now if the Prime Minister and members of the government have always considered Quebec has being easily subdued, and if a year ago the Prime Minister himself stated that he had settled the matter, it is not because he is frustrated today that we will conveniently disregard the privileges of the House.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

[English]

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to address myself for a brief moment to the very narrow, specific point before Your Honour. The danger here is that we as a parliament may become totally irrelevant. We saw an example of that today during the discussion on the Auditor General's report. I submit to Your Honour rather briefly that the precedent set out by Mr. Speaker Lamoureux in 1969 is no longer relevant because since that time parliament has addressed itself to the problem of ministerial statements in the House. This, of course, was only adopted by this House since last December, less than a year ago. However, there is a rule in our proceedings, Standing Order 15(3), which we never had before, which makes provision for ministers, which includes the Prime Minister, to make statements in the House when parliament is sitting.

There is also provision in the same Standing Order for opposition parties in the House to have an opportunity to respond to such statements. I submit that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, and this House in its wisdom, since it adopted that Standing Order, obviously saw a need when parliament is sitting for ministers to make statements on major issues in this House and not outside the House.

I submit very respectfully to Your Honour that there has never come before this parliament an issue more important to the country than the issue the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) intends to address himself to tomorrow night outside parliament. Unless this House is to become totally irrelevant, I would appeal to you, sir, as the guardian of this House and as the custodian of our rights and privileges, to rule that this statement, in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders laid down by this House, should be made in the House before it is made elsewhere.

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, in rising on this question of privilege I want to underline for the second time the remarks and the points so ably put forward by the leader of the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), when he stated that in respect of the case before us it should be underlined that we are now involved in a parliamentary system of government and not a presidential system of government. Of course, on many occasions the president is given free television time by all the networks when there is a question of national interest. On these occasions, as chief of state he addresses the public at large. I suggest that in this instance, in the instance of the question of keeping Canadians together in the Canadian union after what happened a week ago, this is a role for the Governor General of Canada and is not a role for the prime minister of a political party.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Grafftey: I will tell members opposite why I say this. I reiterate for the second time that on the question of keeping the union together, if someone should speak for all Canadians as chief of state, that speech should be made, if at all, by the