

Privilege—Mr. Crosbie

Mr. Crosbie: That is the small one. I am quoting from the large. The large Oxford dictionary says "decision" means "the action of deciding (a contest, controversy, question) a settlement, a determination or the action of deciding". It goes on to say "the making up of one's mind on any point or on a course of action; a resolution; determination".

Why do I refer to the definition of "decision"? Because there is an attempt to quibble about what that word means. There was already an attempt made by the Minister of Justice, as he is quoted in a Canadian Press story today, to say: "When it is not signed it is not a decision." There is a new principle now. You do not make a decision until something is signed. If I decide to walk across the street, it is not a decision until I sign it. If I decide to leave this building to go somewhere, it is not a decision until it is signed. If the government or one of its committees makes a decision, it is not a decision until somebody produces written evidence of the decision. They no longer have memories or no longer know what they have decided. It is nothing until somebody puts it into writing and it is signed as an order in council. That will not wash with the people of this country.

What does all this add up to? What it does add up to is that this House was not given a true and correct answer to the question that was asked by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition on Tuesday which dealt with a most serious public question. Is this a breach of privilege? How can the parliamentary system of government function if members of the House, and the public, cannot obtain or no longer expect to obtain factual, true and correct answers from ministers—not equivocations which will be based on the minister later saying that there was no decision because there was no order in council passed. Everyone in the country knows that a decision was made when the cabinet met on Tuesday morning. Suppose the decision was conditional as the Prime Minister said it was, conditional on what?

There was no communication between the Prime Minister or his ministers and the Newfoundland government from Friday of last week when the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources met with the Newfoundland minister of energy, mines and resources until the Minister of Justice flew to Newfoundland to have his press conference. The decision was not conditional upon the government of Newfoundland agreeing. It was not conditional on the government of Newfoundland being asked to do something. It was not conditional on the government of Newfoundland being informed. The Newfoundland government was not informed. It heard about the decision after the defeated Liberal leader of the opposition in Newfoundland heard about it. He has repudiated the whole course of action which, of course, is irrelevant.

After just having laid out these facts as I know them, I want to end by saying that these facts naturally can only be prima facie until someone with the power to investigate and look into this matter can do so and summon witnesses to be heard.

If our system has reached the point where we can no longer trust what we are told by ministers of the Crown in the House, if we have come to the point where evasion, half-truths,

specious reasoning is given to us instead of factual answers to questions—because all the Leader of the Opposition asked for was facts—then the parliamentary system of government can no longer work in the House. It can no longer work if we have to study every answer and refer to the dictionary after answers to all our questions in order to look up every word they have used, to see what the dictionary says it means or what the Liberal cabinet minister understood it to mean in the twisted confines of that cabinet minister's mind.

I would like to end by quoting from Macbeth:

I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt the equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth; Fear not till Birnam wood
Do come to Dunsinane;—

Birnam wood is coming to Dunsinane because we doubt the fiend that lies like truth. Therefore, after we are concluded here, if you find there is a prima facie case—which I hope you will because this has to be put a stop to and we owe it to the people of Canada to see that this is put a stop to—I will move:

That it is the opinion of this House:

That in stating to the House on Tuesday, May 18, at page 17534 of *Hansard* in reply to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, that "there has been no decision made by the government at this time on that question," the Minister of Justice was deliberately misleading the House;

And, that this House therefore resolves: That the matter of the deliberately misleading statement made to the House by the Minister of Justice on Tuesday, May 18, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections;

And that the committee report to the House as to whether the statements of the Minister of Justice constitute a contempt of the House, and whether the conduct of the minister is consistent with that expected of a minister of the Crown.

That is the motion I will move because I believe this kind of sharp practice and pretence must be stopped. This deviousness and this kind of answer must be stopped.

Let me also say that I am quite prepared to put my seat on the line, and if there is a proper forum to investigate this matter I charge that minister with deliberately misrepresenting the truth to the House. I am prepared to back that up. I am prepared to resign if a fair and proper forum finds that he did not knowingly and deliberately mislead the House. I am prepared to run again when the government sets a date for a by-election, if they dare to set a by-election date. I will then be back here again with ten times the majority I had the last time.

• (1600)

I also want the Minister of Justice to put his seat on the line. I want him to resign if such a committee finds that he deliberately misled the House, as he in fact did yesterday in a disgraceful and pusillanimous manner.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Resign!

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!