

Mr. Speaker: I will hear them, and I propose to do so. However, I felt I should first bring to the attention of the House the rather clear precedents that have been enunciated on this matter in the past, particularly by my very distinguished predecessor on October 30, 1969, as recorded at page 269 of *Hansard* for that day. This concerned a similar question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), having to do with a very similar question about the necessity for ministers to make statements in the House as opposed to making them to the public, and whether that constituted a question of privilege. I am sure that rather clear precedent is in the minds of those hon. members who wish to participate in the discussion.

Before calling on those two hon. members to participate, I would only want to make sure we are keeping that clear precedent in mind when considering whether, in fact, there is a question of privilege in this particular instance.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, whether this matter is a question of privilege or a point of order is really only of interest in terms of the House of Commons. What we are really talking about is the propriety of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) making an announcement outside the House, an announcement that by reason of its significance ought only to be made here. Let me just say that I would hope the government leader of the House, wherever he is, or the acting government House leader, whoever that is today, will convey to the Prime Minister, if we have not been able to do so, the importance of this question.

I am sure I speak for all members of this House of Commons, at least on this side, but I would hope on the other side as well, when I say we are prepared to give our consent, with your permission, sir, to setting aside this evening or tomorrow immediately after calling orders of the day an appropriate time for the Prime Minister to make whatever statement he would wish to make in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister has indicated that he would prefer this to be done during the question period. I do not want to prevail upon your good humour, Mr. Speaker, but I would suggest that is a facetious suggestion in light of the operations of the question period in this House. It was not designed for that kind of thing.

The alternative would be a statement on motions. That would certainly be appropriate, and we would be prepared to give our consent to such a statement tonight or tomorrow. I am sure the Chair would be able to prevail upon the House to provide more time for questioning if that became necessary.

As to the use of an opposition day, I realize there is concern in this country, but surely there is a duty on the government not to ask the opposition to move a motion to explore the matter but, rather, for the government directly to explore the matter here in this House of Commons and, hopefully, to show the leadership which the situation demands.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): There is one other matter, sir. The question raised by the Prime Minister would leave the

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

impression that we had never been interested in this. I think the public record will show otherwise. The fact of the matter is that the leader of the NDP brought the matter to this House at his first opportunity after the public announcement. He raised this question with respect to infringement at the first opportunity, and to imply—as the Prime Minister did a few minutes ago—that this is an issue in terms of merely procedural matters in the House is to lend credence to a charge that anyone might be prepared to make, that the Prime Minister is acting irresponsibly in terms of this House. In order to change that, I want to say now that we are prepared on this side of the House, in this party, to set aside the public business for a period of time this evening, or tomorrow if that should be necessary, on any reasonable terms the government might wish to propose, in order that the Prime Minister can make his statement here, a statement he perhaps should make on television but which should be made first here in the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that in so far as Your Honour is concerned, this is a matter that has to be looked at in procedural terms. I want to suggest to you that in all our history there is no precedent for this situation. Never before was a provincial government elected representing a party which proposes that confederation, itself be brought to an end. I suggest you will find nothing in the history of this parliament to correspond to the present situation.

● (1520)

I agree with Your Honour that we have to concern ourselves about the narrow procedural point, namely, have the members of this House had their privileges overridden by the action of the Prime Minister, (Mr. Trudeau) in announcing, that he will make a statement to the people of Canada by radio and television tomorrow night. Our point of privilege is that the place where this statement ought to be made first is here on the floor of parliament. For the Prime Minister to say there have been opportunities to ask questions or to raise the matter on opposition days is entirely beside the point. It is not the opposition but, rather, the government which decides what business will be brought before parliament.

The Prime Minister complains that this sort of question was not raised yesterday, the day before or any time last week. It was not until today that it was made clear from the Prime Minister's office that he is going to go on radio and television tomorrow night before he makes his statement on the floor of the House.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, despite the precedent of October 30, 1969, to which you referred, that this is a brand new situation. The issue touches confederation itself. If there is anything about which members of parliament should be concerned, and