

Oral Questions

be harmful? What possible results could the government have that might be harmful to the relations between the federal government and the provinces in a poll that is financed by the taxpayers of this country?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, the hon. member will be able to see for himself when I make the polls public in the next few weeks or months. We have made 13 of them public until now. Everyone can see the kind of questions we have asked in the past, and I am convinced that the hon. member will understand when these polls are made public that the questions do not deal only with the constitutional problem.

[English]

Mr. Nystrom: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I should like to ask the Minister of Justice what can possibly be so harmful about public opinion? It is the Canadian public opinion that he is trying to hold back from the House.

The minister says in his letter that later on these polls will be made public. I should like to ask him now for a commitment that the three polls referred to will be made public before the joint committee on the constitution meets. If he cannot do that, can he at least assure the House that those three polls will be made public before the committee has to make a final recommendation to this House on the resolution on the constitution? I think we have a right to know, as opposition members of Parliament, what information the government has.

[Translation]

Mr. Chrétien: Madam Speaker, I have made public 13 of the results of the polls taken during the last 18 months, and from the response of hon. members it seems that they might have preferred that none of them had been made public. In any case, Madam Speaker, our policy is very clear. When we are through using the polls for policy development purposes, we shall make them public. At this time, these polls are being used to develop certain policies which have not yet been finalized by the government in many areas, and we shall make them public when the policies have been announced.

[English]

REQUEST MINISTER RECONSIDER REFUSAL TO RELEASE POLL RESULTS

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, there is no thinking member in this House of Commons who can accept the garbage we have just heard from the Minister of Justice.

An hon. Member: Sit down.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Not one. To say that is to say that it is wrong for people to be informed of what the collective opinion is on a public issue. Would the minister

reconsider what he has just said in the spirit of freedom of information—this freedom that was talked about in Toronto a few days ago by the Minister of Communications. Would the minister reconsider what he is saying in terms of the damage he is doing to this whole process in this Parliament?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, I am very surprised by the attitude of the hon. member. We shall make public today or tomorrow 129 of the 141 polls made by the government during the last 18 months, some of which were taken by the Progressive Conservative administration and not made public at the time, which we will now do. As I have said, we shall also make public the three others which are under my control in due time. As a matter of fact, the Freedom of Information Act provides for a certain lapse of time between the application and the moment when the minister must make the information public, and we shall follow the spirit of the law.

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[English]

PRIVILEGE

MR. CLARK—ADVERTISEMENT SPONSORED BY PUBLICATIONS CANADA

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege relating to a matter that has recently come to my attention and that, in my judgment, constitutes not only a breach of the privileges of this House but also, I regret to inform you, an indication of contempt by the government for the Chair and your responsibilities as Speaker of the House of Commons.

The House will recall that there is before your Honour for your decision a question of privilege raised and argued in this House at some length in relation to government advertising, having to do with the matter which is under discussion by the House of Commons and on which the House of Commons has not yet reached a decision, that is to say, the contents of the draft resolution proposed by the government. That is a matter on which Your Honour has not yet rendered judgment.

Between the time the question was raised and before Your Honour's decision, an advertisement has begun to appear in newspapers across the land. This appeared in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, this morning, on page 17, under the title "Something to Think About". It is sponsored by an organization called Publications Canada, which I can only assume is the successor to Information Canada, of infamous renown in the House of Commons and the country.

This advertisement invites Canadians to go to their urban post offices and secure two documents which will give them more information about the matters that are under debate and have yet to be decided in the House of Commons.