

*Alleged Absence of Member for Yukon*

1966. In looking through the official report, I notice that from August 29, 1966 to September 25, 1967, 41 votes were taken in the house, and the member who sits in the opposition, who is not a minister and who has no ministerial duties, did not take part in 32 votes, that is he has been absent 32 times when votes were taken.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order. I must intervene at this stage to remind the hon. member that he cannot make a historical account of the matter he is now raising.

It is just a matter of indicating the nature of the question of privilege and the Chair must give its ruling later on to determine if there is a prima facie question of privilege. Until such decision has been rendered, I do not think the hon. member can discuss the matter in detail.

**Mr. Choquette:** Mr. Speaker, I conclude by following your instructions.

I simply wanted to point out to your attention that standing order 5 requires that an hon. member must request leave of absence from the house if he has to be away. An hon. member who is always absent, without having asked the authorization of the house, is violating that standing order, and when I think that the hon. member for Saguenay (Mr. Blouin), who represents the largest riding in Canada, with a population larger than that of the Yukon, is always here, I say that the hon. member for Yukon shows great irresponsibility by being always absent. I do not ask that the same penalties imposed against congressman Clayton Powell be imposed against him, however—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Choquette:** —he should apologize.

[English]

**Hon. Michael Starr (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Lotbinière, I should like to point out that his references to dates of absence on the part of the hon. member for Yukon are not true. I am not surprised that such an obviously spurious question of privilege should be raised by a member who is notorious for irresponsibility and his complete lack of understanding of parliamentary procedure. I am a little surprised, however, that he should raise it on the flimsy pretence that it concerns the privileges of this house, with all the implications inherent in such charge for all hon. members.

[Mr. Choquette.]

I am reminded, Mr. Speaker, of the Biblical account of the woman taken in adultery who was about to be stoned by the righteous. On that occasion our Lord said "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone"—an injunction, Mr. Speaker, we would all do well to ponder in the circumstances which have been so unnecessarily created by the hon. member for Lotbinière.

In its wisdom, over many years of practical experience this parliament has accepted certain rules as to the conduct and attendance at sittings of hon. members. To the newcomer to this house or to those who are ignorant of the peculiar nature of our Canadian confederation, these rules may appear too vague, too flexible and too loose. However, Mr. Speaker, I recall to Your Honour that of our 265—soon to be 264—federal constituencies, no two are exactly identical in size, territorial extent and boundaries, or in distance from the seat of government.

**Mr. Choquette:** The hon. member for Saguenay is always here.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Starr:** May I remind the hon. member that the riding of Lotbinière, for instance, is a pleasantly compact rural riding within easy commuting distance of Ottawa—I understand about 250 miles—and is well served by rail, road and even air.

**Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South):** But not by members.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Starr:** The riding of Yukon, on the other hand, is a vast and distant constituency, ten times as distant and difficult of access by any means of travel when judged by the standards of Lotbinière. Almost each one of our 265 ridings is different in this respect.

There has been no question for many years of the attendance of a member being enforced, Mr. Speaker. If attendance is not enforced, then absence cannot be a breach. The last episode in Canada was a special case involving Sir John A. Macdonald. It was a matter of his having been named to a committee dealing with election breaches in Northumberland county. The other member of the committee was a Mr. Pearson, no relation of the Prime Minister I know.

• (2:50 p.m.)

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.