

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

Mr. Grafftey: You are worse than Mackenzie King ever was.

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member—

Mr. Grafftey: Playing with national unity.

Mr. Trudeau:—that I have no hesitation in continuing to make this case, which seems to be a very calm and rational one provided the hon. member is prepared to listen to reason, which is not very certain. I repeat that we are prepared to discuss this subject, but there has been no demand from the opposition that we do so. There has been a great deal of demand every day, and several times a day, from various representatives of the media that I speak to them, and I have accepted their invitation. Now the opposition parties in the House, in a sudden awakening of their interest in what happened in Quebec, are raising these phony issues.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: If they want to debate—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We are on a very narrow issue here, from a procedural point of view. The issue is not whether it is desirable or undesirable or permissible that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) make a statement on television tomorrow. We are concerned with a narrow procedural point, which is whether or not there is a case for indicating that the privileges of the members of the House have been offended in such a way that this matter ought to take precedence over other business which is before the House at the present time in order that a decision be taken by the House, if such is the case, which would be dealt with in some way. The discussion ought to be confined to that narrow point only, rather than attempting to debate the larger question of whether it is appropriate for the Prime Minister to make such a statement.

● (1510)

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying that if members of the House had felt some of their privileges were infringed upon by not having this subject debated earlier, or even today, then I express my astonishment that they waited to show their anxiety until they realized or learned from the media that I was going to speak to the people of Canada through the media.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the question of privilege raised by the leader of the NDP, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), a question of privilege which I believe to be well-founded in response to an action, and not the first, by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to try to derogate the authority of parliament and take away from this chamber the responsibility which appropriately belongs to members of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Trudeau.]

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I think it is important—and even the Prime Minister, finding a moment of fairness, will recognize this—that leaders and spokesmen of all the parties on this side of the House have been both careful and active in speaking on the question at issue. The matter here is not, as the Prime Minister would like to suggest, whether this particular subject is newly important. The question at issue has to do, not with the subject matter of the Prime Minister's remarks but with the right of this institution to be the place where these remarks are first stated if they are of significance to public policy and the governing of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The Prime Minister has said he finds it strange that the leader of the NDP should raise this matter in his question of privilege and I, in my motion under Standing Order 43, should express an interest in the matter. Sir, I find it strange that the Prime Minister should be surprised at the interest in the effectiveness of parliament, as an institution, of the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby and myself and our colleagues on this side of the House, because that is the issue here. The issue is quite clear. If the Prime Minister has a major statement to make of consequence to the country, the place for him to make it, as the first minister of parliament, is here in the Parliament of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: If he does not have a statement of significant importance, if it is only in answer to the inquiries of journalists, then he has no right at all to command the air time of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: That action, sir, calls into question—and this is a matter of very real concern to us on this side of the House—the capacity for the retention of independence and integrity in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation particularly, and the broadcasting media which is subject to regulation by this government and should not be subject to undue pressures by the government. I repeat the point, sir: if the Prime Minister has something of importance to say to the nation, he should say it here in the House of Commons. If all he is doing is answering inquiries by journalists, he should change his practice and begin to meet those journalists face to face and not try to command and pre-empt time on the broadcast networks which the government regulates.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I see that the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) both want to speak, presumably in support of the proposed question of privilege.

An hon. Member: Let's hear them.