

Privilege

deputy clerk of the committee because I am literally flabbergasted.

Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, we from the Bloc Québécois had requested to sit on this committee. The participation of the Parti Québécois was not allowed because of its ideology. I suppose that funding will now be denied to the Canadian Economic Council now that it has spoken out for sovereignty-association. This kind of partisanship that does not have its place in the House of Commons.

In closing I will say to you that I feel my privileges, as a Member of Parliament, have been breached, that such incident will never cast a doubt over my commitment to independence in the minds of the people of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead and that any unauthorized expenses will have to be reimbursed. Mr. Speaker, you probably remember that we from the Bloc—

[*English*]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief in terms of commenting on some of the points made by the hon. member.

The hon. member seems to be objecting to the fact that he is not on this committee and that he, as a member of Parliament, being an equal of any other member of Parliament has the right to be on that committee. Carrying that to its logical conclusion, the only committee we can have around here is a 294 member committee, committee of the whole.

That is not the way we operate, of course. We have the recognition of the complexity of certain issues and the need to deal with many issues at the same time.

We have had for decades and decades, going back I do not know how long, the practice of assigning to committees special subjects for study. Of course, that is exactly what happened in terms of the constitutional papers and the special committee. In this case, a joint committee was set up.

Membership was established based on numerous precedents going back many years. It was dealt with no differently than any other committee. The hon. member seems to say that because he is a member of Parliament, equal to the others—we agree—that he should have his

travel expenses picked up if he chooses to travel with a committee.

Again, taking that to its logical extension, Mr. Speaker, any time a committee of this House were to travel to another country, for example, as happens frequently in terms of the studies they undertake, then every other member of the House has the right to go along.

I humbly suggest that would make it impossible for us to do anything. What is happening with the unity committee is precisely the same kind of thing that has happened in regard to committees of this House going back long before any of us were here and long before any of us were born.

There is no precedent being established here. It is established practice and I do not think the member's question of privilege has any basis.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, in ruling after ruling after ruling, yourself and other Speakers before you have determined that these kinds of interventions, although it is probably appropriate that they be heard, are matters which really are properly dealt with by the committee itself.

Certainly whatever arrangements the committee has arrived at in order to do its job properly, the committee has arrived at in the context of its own authority and this is not properly a matter for the House to consider as indeed so many other Speakers, including yourself, have ruled over the years.

The committee is its own master in this respect and it is not appropriate to be debating the arrangements that have been made in the committee on the floor of the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak on this issue, even more so after hearing my colleague from Winnipeg Transcona.

The basic issue raised by the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead is whether members of this House who are not official members of the Joint Committee on the Constitution had their travel expenses refunded or not. We claim that New Democratic members who are not officially on the Joint Committee travelled with it at the expense of the House of Commons.