

Privilege—Mr. Clark

Resources, will apply as well to heating oil and a number of other commodities previously exempted.

As I say, Madam Speaker, I raise the matter not because there is a rule to which I can appeal but because there is a spirit to which I can address myself. There is a spirit of co-operation in this House that calls upon ministers to adopt a practice that we try to follow and I would say that generally ministers on the other side try to follow, that of giving advance notice about matters which will have serious repercussions for the country.

The action taken today is bound to jeopardize the energy negotiations going on between the producing provinces and the Government of Canada. It is bound to jeopardize the constitutional discussions going on in Montreal and which are scheduled for Toronto, Vancouver and later, Ottawa. As recently as this week this House gave unanimous consent to moving forward quickly on veterans' legislation, Bill C-30, but this action has been put in great jeopardy the capacity of Parliament to operate in such a co-operative fashion.

I simply raise this matter with you, Madam Speaker. I cannot address my appeal to any particular rule except that of courtesy, the rule of intelligent conduct in this House and the advisability of proceeding in a way that will allow the House of Commons to function co-operatively. The spirit of co-operation must carry through so that relations between the federal and provincial governments may proceed in good faith, and so that the word of the Government of Canada can be taken as being valid rather than something to be changed and undercut by a surprise announcement by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, without warning or consultation, of a very severe tax imposed by way of an undebatable action in the House of Commons.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has risen on a question of privilege and he admitted at the outset of his remarks that it had absolutely no basis and that he was strictly appealing to parliamentary spirit and courtesy. However, I believe that if he truly respected this institution, he would at least make sure to abide by the rules. On occasion, House leaders meet to discuss the procedure to be followed, and I must admit that until now, I have been getting along quite well with his House leader and that we have had positive results during this first part of the session. However, in this case, he is not raising a valid question. He is using or abusing the rules of the House to debate a question which is certainly important, but there are other occasions provided under the Standing Orders for him to discuss this important issue. Next Monday, the Leader of the Opposition knows quite well—

Mr. Huntington: You are abusing the whole chamber.

Mr. Pinard: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Huntington: You are abusing the whole chamber.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows quite well that next Monday will be an opposition day. He will have all the time needed during the weekend to consider the ways and means motion which was tabled today. If he so wishes, he can include in his own motion the issue of energy and discuss this matter properly according to our procedure. However, I believe that it is not quite honest to appeal to parliamentary spirit and courtesy and thus abuse the Standing Orders in an attempt to discuss a ways and means motion, which is not debatable. Standing Order 15 provides that we do not have to make a ministerial statement. If the minister wanted to make a statement, he is clearly free to do so. He decided not to, as is his privilege, and the Leader of the Opposition is well aware of it.

The procedure adopted today is absolutely appropriate and normal. It so happens that this is a matter of particular interest to the Progressive Conservative party. However, this is not a reason to force the minister into a statement. Once again, meetings are provided which make it possible for the parliamentary leaders to discuss the means to bring about a discussion on various subjects, in an orderly way, in compliance with our standing orders and in a parliamentary spirit. However, Madam Speaker, I submit that in order to elicit this courtesy, to promote this parliamentary spirit, one should not abuse the standing orders as the Leader of the Opposition has just done for five minutes by debating a matter which certainly is not a question of privilege; he has simply made a political statement when he had absolutely no right to do so.

That, Madam Speaker, is what is wrong with the present situation. They try to solicit our courtesy and our co-operation by making ill use of the Standing Orders and this is unacceptable. If the Leader of the Opposition had good reason to proceed in this way, Madam Speaker, I would say no more. But once again, I insist, since the beginning of this session by way of meetings with parliamentary leaders, we have succeeded in making significant progress. We have been able to initiate parliamentary task forces which will benefit Parliament, and in a parliamentary spirit. We have reached a major agreement with respect to supply by providing a few days of Committee of the Whole, in a parliamentary spirit.

We have adopted somewhere between 15 and 20 bills which were technically urgent, always in a parliamentary spirit. I wonder why the Leader of the Opposition makes ill use of the Standing Orders in the name of parliamentary spirit by raising a question of privilege which clearly it is not, to debate in an absolutely inappropriate manner a notice of motion which was tabled in accordance with the Standing Orders and at a time when the House still has at least one week to convene before adjourning for the summer and when the opposition will be given an opposition day which will allow it to address itself to this matter of energy.