

there is the difficulty of interpreting the definition if such a definition were attempted.

That is some justification, I presume, for the rationale behind the very clear precedent to which reference was made by the Chair during the debate on the question referred to by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) of the Prime Minister's appearance on television last week. That precedent was cited by the Chair. It is renewed, as a result of that discussion, at page 1285 of *Hansard* for Tuesday, November 23, and is crystal-clear.

I want to take a few seconds, however, to stress an aspect of the argument that appeals to me. Certainly, it is always dangerous for the Chair to get into gratuitous observations that are outside the ambit of the argument put forward. But in light of the intervention by the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) I think I have to say that the question of relevance to which he referred is one that does, I am sure, cause all members some concern. No member of this House can be unaware of the dangers that are at least described, whether they are artificial or real, or the fear held by the Canadian people concerning their parliament. I am sure their fears are common in respect of the governments of all the countries of the western world today, that is, that democratic governments as we know them have a tendency to become irrelevant in the opinion of the public.

There is one thing that can be absolutely certain. When a minister makes a statement in this House and is questioned by hon. members, it is always on a matter of topical importance and is always, therefore, extremely relevant to the day to day events. Often it happens that parliament has to deal, particularly in respect of legislation, with events that are pretty much after the fact. That is the nature of legislation. It needs time to be considered and, therefore, the rules often put is somewhat behind the events that give rise to the spirit behind the particular bill. But when a minister makes a statement in the House of Commons, he is always speaking on a topical subject and the questions are very current and very topical. Therefore, it is an opportunity, as the hon. member for St. John's West has described, for this House to emphasize its relevance to current matters.

It is, I am sure, no surprise that members who, if they cannot establish technically a question of privilege, certainly express their deep disappointment when the opportunity to make such a statement in the House is missed. I do not wish to say whether that is the case today or not, but the fact is that it certainly is no surprise that that disappointment and that chagrin is expressed in the terms that were expressed this week, which were expressed last week, and indeed in examining all the precedents on this subject the same sentiments are expressed at all times when such an argument is put forward.

If the sentiments themselves are valid it is clear, as well, however, that the question of privilege is not. The precedent is crystal-clear, and for me now to find that a question of privilege exists, in the circumstances, would be to fly directly in the face of the precedent and to do an injustice to the long-standing practice of being guided by clear precedents.

Privilege—Mr. McCleave

There are times when precedents may give room for some ambiguity and some flexibility in that regard. The language of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux, one of the most distinguished, if not the most distinguished Speaker in the history of the House of Commons, in this respect is crystal-clear. It cannot be doubted; it cannot be in any way ambiguous; it is very clear and direct. It has been cited, as I previously indicated. For me to attempt to say otherwise, in the face of the following language which I quote now, would be improper:

The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether hon. members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion.

That language could not be more applicable to the present situation. Accordingly, I have to find that no question of privilege exists.

MR. McCLEAVE—LANGUAGE USED BY PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege. I raise this question at the first available opportunity. I tried to raise it at three o'clock, at the end of the question period, when the right is given to us to raise questions of privilege. Therefore, I consider that I had raised the matter, now having been recognized by Your Honour at the first available opportunity.

My question of privilege arises out of the words used by the Prime Minister of this country at about five minutes to three this afternoon in response to a question that was directed to him from this side of the House. As I heard the right hon. gentleman, he used the phrase "smuggled in lies". This is my understanding. If I should be wrong on that I, of course, will make the best apology I can for having misunderstood what I thought had been said. But my understanding is that he did use the words "smuggled in lies" with reference to the words of members on this side of the House.

The argument I therefore make now, sir, is that this in fact constitutes a prima facie breach of privilege and is a matter to be scouted in a committee of the House of Commons. I will give you, sir, the motion I would intend to move, and then, if I may be permitted, I would back it with the best argument I can put forward. My motion would be—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not want to interrupt the hon. member, and will certainly permit him to go on. I think he will realize that the Chair and other hon. members will be at a disadvantage in not being able to examine, ultimately in order to judge the merit of the motion, exactly the language that was used and, indeed, the context in which it was used. It seems to me it would be prudent for all those who may wish to participate in the discussion to take the hon. member's action today as notice of his intention to raise the question when it is possible to use, as part of the argument, the actual language used.