

● (1500)

What are those rights and responsibilities, Mr. Speaker? Members of parliament are elected by Canadians who expect us to deal in parliament with the political problems that are faced by the nation. The government of the day has the principal obligation to propose, to initiate and to act. Other members, and of particular importance in a parliamentary democracy, opposition members, have the obligation to question, to criticize and to respond. The appropriate forum for all these actions, long recognized in the history of parliament both here and elsewhere, and of equal importance to members on both sides of this chamber, is the House of Commons.

It is expected that the government initiates action in this House and that the opposition responds to that action in this House. It is anticipated that the government of the day must explain, justify and convince in this forum. This constitutes its right and obligation in a parliamentary democracy. It is anticipated that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will probe, question and demand in response to government action in this chamber. This constitutes its right and obligation.

According to an announcement from the Prime Minister's office yesterday, the Prime Minister intends to speak on television and radio tomorrow night—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent:—giving his reaction to the important election which took place in the province of Quebec. He has no intention, I am informed by reports from his office, of bringing this matter first to the Parliament of Canada. I say most seriously, Mr. Speaker, that in so acting the Prime Minister has violated in a most serious way the obligations of his office and has trampled upon the equally important rights of the opposition in this parliament. If ever a matter required the direct attention of the elected representatives of the people of Canada, it is the election of the Parti Quebecois as the provincial government of the province of Quebec. If ever a matter required the sober, serious and public debate of Canada's parliamentarians, it is the question of the very existence of Canada itself.

We support and consider wise the Prime Minister's decision to wait more than a week since that election before making a sober and serious statement on the consequences of the election for Canada. I think an earlier response would have been inappropriate. It is a serious matter requiring delay and serious thought, so we support the delay in time. We also support the intention of the Prime Minister to take his message at some early time directly to the people of Canada on television, on radio and through other forms of communication. That, too, is important in a democracy. However, what is at fault here is the deliberate decision, made calmly more than a week after the event, to bypass parliament entirely. What is at fault is the Prime Minister's ignoring of the essence of parliamentary democracy.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

Mr. Broadbent: I wish Liberals would listen to the argument. Even if they ignore the rights of parliament, Mr. Speaker, they should hear my argument. I was saying that it was the obligation of a government to bring before parliament its plans and to subject itself to the scrutiny of the opposition. Had the Prime Minister decided to do what he ought to do, namely, make a statement on motions, he would have his opportunity, as the Prime Minister of the country, to state his views on this serious issue. Then, with equal right, leaders of the opposition parties in this House, and indeed other members of the House, would have the opportunity to comment on and question the Prime Minister regarding his particular decision.

The Canadian Prime Minister is not elected directly by the people of Canada, as is the President of the United States, for example, in the kind of electoral system that resides in the country to our south. The Prime Minister, in our system, is the head of the political party which happens to have the greatest support in the parliament of Canada and as such, in our system, the Prime Minister has an obligation to deal directly in parliament with public matters. To bypass parliament is to ignore his constitutional responsibilities and to deny the right of those of us in opposition to exercise our responsibilities.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, if you decide that I have a *prima facie* case for a question of privilege, I would move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), that this House calls upon the Prime Minister to make a statement on motions in the House of Commons tomorrow on the important matter of the Quebec election before he makes any general statement on this subject on television or on radio, or in any other way before the public.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, on the same question of privilege, the essence of the remarks of the leader of the New Democratic Party is that I am bypassing parliament. I can assure parliament that that is not the fact, nor is it my intention to do so. There have been several questions asked of myself and of members of the government in this House since the Quebec election and I have attempted, as they have attempted, to answer those questions which showed the concern of members opposite.

In so far as having a particular debate on this subject is concerned, Mr. Speaker, the government is prepared to have that debate, or a series of statements on motions, at a time to be decided by the various House leaders. It seems simply strange to me that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark), in his earlier motion under the Standing Orders, and now the leader of the New Democratic Party under a point of privilege, should have suddenly discovered their interest in debating this subject after they had learned that I was going to speak to the Canadian public on the media.

There have been opposition days—at least one—since the Quebec election, and I did not observe the opposition that anxious to debate this subject that it would want to set a date in its own time to discuss the matter. There have been some seven or eight days when, under the Standing Orders, the opposition could indeed have raised this subject for debate, or for adjournment as an important and urgent matter.