

*Privilege—Mr. Clark*

**Madam Speaker:** I am just attempting to introduce a little bit of discipline in respect of these questions of privilege.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. I have researched the number of questions of privilege which have been raised in this House since I have been the Speaker. I do not know whether this relates to the fact that I have become the Speaker, I have not really been able to compare that number with other periods. It seems to me that questions of privilege are being raised in order to air grievances in many cases, or to try to bring in debates which are not those which are before the House and to interrupt the business of the House.

● (1230)

The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition has suggested that something might have to be done about allowing hon. members to air their grievances, and that the Standing Orders do not provide enough occasions on which to air the grievances of hon. members. That is not my business. If the House wishes to change its rules, it may change them, but I am here to apply the rules as I understand and interpret them. I am in the hands of the House, but the House has given me clear instructions through the Standing Orders, and I would not be fulfilling my responsibility if I did not apply those rules as fairly as I possibly can.

I will hear two hon. members on each side and then decide my course of action.

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, with regard to the first point raised by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), he made the suggestion that the government refer to a committee the subject matter on which Your Honour has ruled today, or at least part of it, and I am willing to look at his suggestion if he would be willing to look at the possibility of his party's agreeing to use some of the ten allotted days which are available to the opposition parties from now until December 10. If he makes an effort to use some of those days to debate subjects he considers important, perhaps he would find those to be good opportunities to raise questions which could be debated. They could even be followed by votes, as he well knows, because he is entitled to a few votes on those allotted days. This would have the consequence of freeing the floor of this House for the discussion of the really urgent issues facing this nation.

I suppose Your Honour was right in outlining the fact that there is an obvious abuse of questions of privilege which prevents Parliament from dealing with the real business with which it has to deal under the circumstances.

[*Translation*]

With regard to what he maintains is a new question of privilege today, basing his argument essentially on the fact that he claims again that the government is guilty of misleading publicity, I have only this to say, Madam Speaker: he

quoted two examples which are founded on his own personal interpretation of our constitutional measures. That is the interpretation the Leader of the Opposition gave of section 42 of the constitutional act of 1980, which is only part of the group of measures now before the House. The same goes for the other point he brought up.

I am quite willing to respect his opinion. He can see things as he wishes. I remember well his first speech in the House of Commons early last week when he spoke on the motion to refer the matter to committee. He showed his command of parliamentary procedure by objecting to the fact that the motion, which spoke of the quorum in committee, required the presence of 12 members as being sufficient for a quorum. He said he was shocked that the motion did not mention that at least two parties should be represented to have a quorum.

Since then, I am sure he must have sought the advice of his House leader, because never in a million years has a similar motion in parliamentary practice specified that two parties should be represented to constitute a quorum. In our parliamentary practice and my hon. parliamentary colleague who is a specialist in the matter, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), can vouch for that, the committee itself has always decided how it would proceed and stated that the quorum would consist of so many persons and require, in addition, that two parties be represented.

If he understands our constitutional measures as well as our Standing Orders or parliamentary procedure, I think that you are justified, Madam Speaker, in questioning the validity of his allegations about the truthfulness or falseness of the data we publish.

Madam Speaker, I say this with respect, because the hon. member is not always wrong, but in this case he is mistaken. He does not interpret the facts as we do. And it is exactly the matter being discussed in this first stage soon to be completed, I hope, which the committee will be called upon to discuss and with which the House will deal again when the committee submits its report.

I wonder why the Chair would rule there is a prima facie case of privilege affecting the freedom of speech of members of the House or their duties as elected representatives. Indeed, I wonder why the Chair would so rule, because there is clearly some discrepancy between the facts. As much as I respect the views of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and of the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) on some points. I feel that they in turn should respect mine. We do not agree on the facts and we are willing to debate the issue, Madam Speaker. Debatable questions and different views do not constitute a case of privilege. That is not what is provided under our Standing Orders to make it possible for such a highly respectable institution as Parliament to carry out its business in an orderly fashion.

In conclusion, as I do not want to waste the time of the House, I feel that the further argument put forward by the