

is there. It has been passed. A question of privilege has been raised and you must look at the facts.

What were the motives of the government? I could spend a lot of time replying to the right hon. member because, without any context, this element could lead to false conclusions. I do not want to spend too much time on this issue, but since I have been asked what could have motivated us in the wording of the motion passed by the House and debated, for too long in my opinion, I shall note that I could say quite a lot on this issue. The right hon. member is well aware that we could easily have avoided the committee stage and not have referred the matter to a committee. He is very lucky that we have not done so, but he still complains. He is not even complaining about the substance, but about the form.

We decided to go to a committee, and we chose to do this so that the opposition would have more time to look at the technical aspects of the proposal, Madam Speaker. If the right hon. member wants to know the motives of the action taken by the government, I could spend a lot of time explaining why we wanted to extend this courtesy to the opposition and decided on a three-stage debate when we could very well have chosen a single-stage debate.

● (1720)

[English]

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker what I am interested in determining is whether it will be possible for the joint committee on the constitution to make interim reports to this House and to the Senate of Canada without, by the very fact of making such reports, terminating the existence of the committee. I suppose the reason we ask that question is that there has been an explicit assurance given by the minister's colleague in cabinet, the House leader of the government in the Senate, that there would be the possibility of interim reports. The government House leader in this chamber has now given us a version of his reading of Beauchesne which would suggest that what his colleague said in the Senate is not true in the House of Commons. We obviously cannot have a situation where that prevails.

Perhaps we could simplify matters—if the government House leader does not want to speak of motives relating to what we have done in the past—if he would tell us whether he is prepared to join with us now in expressing the view and acting on the view, if that is necessary, that the special joint committee on the constitution should have the right to make interim reports. It would also simplify matters if the government House leader expressed the view that the action of making interim reports would not stop the life of the joint committee. Would he agree to join with the House of Commons to take such action as is necessary—and the Senate—to ensure that the life of that committee would not be jeopardized by its reporting back to the two Houses which gave it birth?

Point of Order—Mr. Beatty

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is asking me to render a decision in your stead. His own colleague has raised a question of privilege. You have a ruling to make and he puts the question to me; in other words they want to know what I think. Before you take your decision I am expected to give him a legal opinion as to whether your ruling is going to be right or wrong. As I see it, Madam Speaker, that approach is ridiculous. Then the hon. member will be seeking the floor to ask me whether the committee will be allowed to travel. Then again, can the committee not wait to report only in February? And again he will rise to ask me: can we take your place and govern? Well, my answer to that one is no, our party was returned to power in the last election. We assume our responsibilities, we show respect for Parliament and we have agreed to three stages in a debate which could very well have been limited to only one. The Leader of the Opposition undermines the character of this institution when he attempts to restrict the debate to questions of procedure rather than deal with the substance of the proposition which is aimed at turning Canada into a new country, a modern country with a renewed federalism.

[English]

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, may I put the same question to the government House leader in another way? What is the point of his offering to speak to the two co-chairmen of the committee and telling them that the government would not mind their reconsidering the matter of radio and television broadcasting unless—if perchance the committee changes its mind and votes for it—it has the authority to make a report to this House? Should that not be cleared up, or would it not be better for the government to bring in the motion itself?

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: It is much simpler than that, Madam Speaker. For me, the usefulness of speaking to the two co-chairmen, if the opposition parties do not object, is that it will give them an opportunity to review all the comments made on that question by members of the House today. Should they feel that those comments bring to light new facts which would warrant reconsideration on their part, the decision is theirs. They will base their decision on that. They will settle the issue in committee, not here in the House of Commons. They do not need to report to the House of Commons to have that permission. The committee can very well review the question and change its decision. As I said earlier to the Leader of the Opposition, should the Chair rule that the House of Commons must decide, then we will respect the ruling. He has sought to cast some doubt on my comments, but again I repeat that we will abide by the ruling. Abiding by your ruling, Madam Speaker, means that we will act accordingly.