

• (1620)

Thus, I feel that the members of this House and the people of Canada were misled, and I do not put an adverb in front of "misled" because I follow Your Honour's ruling on that matter earlier.

There is no doubt that the Hibernia question is important and vital to our economy and to our energy self-sufficiency, especially since the tar sands megaprojects have collapsed around the head of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. The jurisdiction questions need to be settled quickly; there is no question about that, and that may have caused a frantic deathbed reference to the Supreme Court of Canada by the government, I do not know. The government does not confide in me very often, in spite of what my hon. friends to my right might think. However, that is not the question either. That is not the question we are dealing with here. The point is that in this place we can only operate on trust and openness. Members of Parliament must never doubt and must never be given cause to doubt the veracity of a minister of the Crown. We voted to support the member for St. John's West, and we continue to do so because I and my party are sick of contempt for this Parliament by the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rose: Day after day in this House we are treated to evasive answers or non-answers to legitimate questions put to ministers.

Mr. Cullen: You should hear the questions.

Mr. Rose: Legitimate questions are put to ministers of the Crown by the opposition.

Mr. Cullen: Pointless.

Mr. Rose: We have an inability to cross-examine important ministers of the Crown because they are not in this House. They are spirited away to the Senate, and that also frustrates us. Ministers talk out the clock in committees. That is another of their practices which we find extremely irritating. Their answers are designed to confuse, obfuscate or generally twist or reshape questions, and that is unacceptable. That is what I think has led to the most hostile, rancorous and inefficient Parliament we have had certainly in my memory, which goes back to 1968.

I am almost ready to conclude, Madam Speaker. We sympathize with your position and understand that unless the Minister of Justice admits that his reply was designed intentionally or deliberately to mislead, Your Honour will have some difficulty proving it. Nevertheless, I request that the Speaker's office review the facts as I have presented them, and once that is done, I am convinced a ruling fair to all parties will result.

We agree with the intent of the motion put forward by the hon. member for St. John's West and, if it is found that there is a prima facie case with respect to this issue, we will support a reference to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Privilege—Mr. Crosbie

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. Every Member of Parliament who wishes to rise in this House on issues such as this must proceed carefully because this issue is important and critical. That being the case, a Member of Parliament has to search his mind carefully in preparing his intervention for a debate such as this.

As I understand it, the matter before the House is not the conduct of the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie). The matter before the House is the answers of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), nothing less and nothing more, and whether those answers conformed with the truth.

The Minister of Justice made a number of arguments designed to obfuscate. He raised questions about the presentation of the hon. member for St. John's West. That is not the issue. The issue is whether the answers the minister gave in the House on Tuesday of this week were the truth. In his answer recorded at page 17533 of *Hansard*, at no time did the minister put any conditions before the word "decision". He did not use the words "a final decision". That did not enter *Hansard*. He did not use the words "a legal decision." That did not enter *Hansard*. He did not use the words "a conditional decision". Yesterday the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) tried to put that image on the decision referred to last Tuesday, but last Tuesday the minister was quite clear. He said "no decision", and that is the issue. Was there a decision or was there not a decision?

I appreciate the remarks of the hon. member for Mission-Port Moody (Mr. Rose). He said that in order to protect the privileges of members of this House the truth must prevail in this place. That matter goes beyond whether the hon. member for St. John's West or, for that matter, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) receive truthful answers to whether, by extension through this House, the people of Canada receive truthful answers as well. That is extremely important for our country at this time.

I am not talking about political or regional differences. When members of this House and ministers of the Crown rise and speak in this place, they must be believed and what they say must be the truth. That is a very serious matter as we look at our country at this moment. It is too easy to say that the answer given was in tune with the political times or that the end justifies the means—

Mr. Pinard: Be serious.

Mr. Epp: —or that situational ethics are the order of the day. The issue is whether the words of the minister were the truth.

The situation the Chair now faces is the question of a decision. If it was not a decision, as the minister likes to put forward—it was not a decision until the order in council was signed. By extension, do we then use the same argument in the legislative process that the cabinet has made no decision until a bill has been proclaimed?