

Privilege—Mr. Penner

examples of things he would do regarding lotteries and the offshore, on which there had already been signed agreements between the federal government and the provinces. Could he tell the House whether he will present to the people of Quebec and Canada his formula for a new federalism? He wants to get out of the status quo. Will he hold a federal-provincial conference on the constitution very soon, so that the people of Canada can know what this new federalism of the Prime Minister is?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of convening a federal-provincial conference on constitutional matters quickly, and I should suggest to the right hon. gentleman that most of the people of Canada are much more capable of understanding our approach to federalism than he is. That is probably because he is so blinded—and I hope this is an affliction he can overcome—by what he has done that he will not see the limitations in what he has done and the possibility that the stance he and his government took as the Government of Canada became an instrument capable of exploitation by the Parti Québécois as a means of encouraging Quebecers to move toward separation.

Mr. Trudeau: Count your members from Quebec.

Mr. Clark: I understand how difficult it is for the right hon. gentleman to admit that there was some error in what he did in the past. I am quite pleased to admit, as I have done on several occasions, that several of the actions of his government contributed substantially to making French Canadians and Quebecers feel more at home in the nation, but as his government grew older it became perceived as a government which was more rigid, and one of the major things we have to do is make it clear that that rigidity no longer prevails. That is what we intend to do as a national government.

Mr. Breau: The Liberals got 62 per cent of the vote.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. PENNER—FAILURE OF MINISTER TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTS

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which arises from a question I asked yesterday during question period of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I asked the minister why he had not released to me a number of documents which I had requested of his department last Friday. These were documents pertaining to an incident which occurred at a drill site in the Beaufort Sea on October 23.

Nowhere in his reply did the minister give any reason why he would not release the documents in question. I realize that his failure to do so, however inconsistent that may be with the spirit of the freedom of information bill which the government has introduced, does not in itself constitute a question of

[Mr. Trudeau.]

privilege. On the contrary, I suspect that the minister himself has not been able to obtain from his officials all the documents related to the incident, just as I suspect that the minister himself was not informed and did not approve of the order given by one of his officials to continue drilling in poor weather conditions.

What the minister did, however, was to implicate himself in an effort by senior officials here in Ottawa to conceal relevant data and issue instead an interpretative statement in place of the documents which I requested. In doing so, I contend that the minister breached the privileges of members of this House, myself in particular, by promising one thing and delivering quite another.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that I asked the minister why he had not released documents which would show whether or not the regional conservational engineer in Yellowknife had personally visited the drill site and had confirmed the decision of the well site inspector to shut down operations due to weather conditions and would show whether or not Dome-Canmar officials had threatened to go over the heads of well site and regional inspectors, which the minister now admits was done by a telephone call to Ottawa.

In reply to my question asking why the minister had not released the documents in question, the minister said, and I quote:

—I spoke to a colleague of the hon. member—

He was referring to the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand).

—and I am willing to make the information available.

There could be no doubt on the part of anyone on this side of the House; we all believed that what the minister was going to provide were the documents which were the whole subject of my question. The minister did not say to the House that he would not provide the documents because they contained advice to him and are therefore classified confidential. Nor could he have raised such an objection because the documents requested are not, or certainly should not be, confidential. They are documents which might have been requested by any Canadian citizen with the slightest familiarity with drilling, surveillance and reporting procedures. They are documents described in a report of 1978 drilling operations in the Beaufort Sea, and they are mentioned expressly for the purpose of assuring members of Parliament and the Canadian public that an incident of the kind in question would be documented and that documents pertaining to such an incident would be produced to remove any doubt as to the propriety of the actions of officials in this matter.

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In reply to my question the minister did not say he would not provide the documents because they are confidential. Nor did he say he would not provide the documents I asked for but that he would provide further information. Instead, he offered yet another explanation of the incident that was under ques-