

Privilege—Mr. Lalonde

(Mr. Nielsen) to continue on this question of privilege for the simple reason that we are engaging in debate. In Question Period, Madam Speaker, you allowed the Leader of the Opposition to ask his two questions in toto and then, properly, you refused the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) his reply. You were correct within your interpretation of the rules. However, I submit that you allowed the Leader of the Opposition to ask his question in full. There has now been redress by way of a question of privilege by the Minister of Finance. That should end the matter. To allow the Leader of the Opposition to continue this scurrilous debate outside of Question Period is reprehensible.

Mr. Lewis: Did you hear what he said, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: The point of the Hon. Member is certainly well taken, but he is talking of two different circumstances. What I did during the Question Period was totally within the rules, of course. I think the Hon. Member for recognizing that. I did say that I exercised a bit of leniency in the raising of this question of privilege. My decision is that I will allow the Leader of the Opposition to reply briefly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, to clarify the situation, I would like to ask whether the House is to conclude that you did not make a ruling on the question of privilege raised by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde), in that you allowed proceedings to continue, or whether you did not make a ruling on the question of privilege raised by the Minister of Finance by saying that there was no privilege; furthermore, I should like to know under what Standing Order the Chair may make a ruling on a question of privilege and then allow someone to speak to a ruling it has already made.

Madam Speaker: I was commenting on the question raised by the Hon. Minister of Finance. It was not a formal ruling. I was pointing out to the Hon. Minister a citation in Beauchesne. I did not have the impression I was making a formal ruling. I would now like to give the Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Nielsen) a chance to make a few comments, as I have often done when questions of privilege have been raised. I repeat, I had not yet made a ruling and was only pointing out a citation in Beauchesne to the Hon. Minister of Finance.

[*English*]

Mr. Nielsen: Madam Speaker, it is my submission that when questions are asked during Question Period that have the effect of reflecting on the conduct of a Member or a Minister, they are deserving of a response in the House and Members or Ministers should be allowed to respond, particularly when it affects their personal conduct.

What we have is a question being raised in the House of Commons on Wednesday, February 16 where the Minister was twice given the opportunity to rise and state his position with respect to his capacity to continue as a Minister by reason of

allegations made at that time of a breach of the guidelines. On February 17, the day on which there is usually a morning meeting of Cabinet, Thursday morning—

Mr. Lalonde: Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. Nielsen: Fair enough. After Question Period. Nonetheless, there was that intervening Cabinet meeting. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) rose in the House on Thursday, February 17, and, as he himself stated, misled the House with respect to the response of the Minister. That is what he said. That in itself is highly questionable with respect to the conduct of the Minister in providing the Prime Minister with information, and he innocently misled the House on the basis of information supplied by the Minister.

Friday the 18th, the weekend of the 19th and 20th, Monday the 21st, Tuesday the 22nd all passed. On the Wednesday, by letter the Minister informs the Prime Minister that his letter of February 17 was wrong and there indeed was prior knowledge.

He sits four seats away from the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen). The Prime Minister was away in the Caribbean. He sits a hand's length away from his telephone on which he could have called the Deputy Prime Minister. He had a Cabinet meeting at which the Deputy Prime Minister was likely present. He goes back and forth in the lobby. Undoubtedly there was all sorts of opportunity to tell the Deputy Prime Minister that he had misled the Prime Minister on the 17th.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Nielsen: He says no, but he had all this time, and he is asking us to believe that his departmental officials in six days, going through these files, could not until the end of those six days have come up with the information. I suggest to the Minister that that is not worthy of belief.

I point out to the Minister that a public statement was made by P. J. Read, the official responsible for the oil conservation fund. In between the 17th and the 23rd Mr. Read made the public statement that the Minister knew of the circumstances of this arrangement. How can he then explain that he sat in his seat for that entire week and did not call upon the Deputy Prime Minister, in the absence of the Prime Minister, to terminate the situation where the Prime Minister had allowed the House to conduct its business for a whole week on the basis of false information supplied to him by the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Chrétien: I rise on a question of Privilege.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am ruling that there is no question of privilege. We have been engaged in debate. I have given equal opportunity to both sides.

Mr. Chrétien: Not to me.

Madam Speaker: I must remind Hon. Members that if the Minister of Finance was not able to answer that question,