

Oral Questions

policy regarding the establishment of French language units across this country will depend on the blackmail, in effect, of members who have bases in their ridings, in an effort to prevent members putting serious questions on matters of government policy. My rights as a member of parliament to ask questions about a matter that is of fundamental importance to my riding are seriously and adversely affected by this kind of answer.

I was trying to elicit information, Mr. Speaker. As the Commissioner of Official Languages has said, it is time that the whole shroud and cloak of secrecy and hocus-pocus that is apparent in so many elements of the government's bilingual policy was removed, but the minister really polluted the atmosphere with that type of comment. I say that he has to withdraw his remarks.

Some hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker, in response to the first question of the hon. member I gave a very clear answer. The Chief of the Defence Staff, General Dextraze, has made a statement on the intention of the department regarding the Canadian armed forces. I said that it was a statement that I supported, and I think that was sufficient answer for the hon. member.

Mr. Paproski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order having to do with the statement made by the Minister of Public Works at the beginning of the question period in connection with the bidding practices of the government. First the minister asked for compliance with tendering practices, and I should like to take this opportunity to specify several inconsistencies in the government's apparent acceptance of the bid that was submitted by R. Owen Ltd., Box 838, Fort Nelson, B.C. To be concise, it appears that there has been a non-compliance with clause 5, subsection 1, page 1 (a) in that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Paproski: The minister wanted some information about compliance, Mr. Speaker. Ten o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair notes the fact that the hon. member for Edmonton Centre has received expanded treatment of this question.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order in connection with the meeting this morning of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications which commenced examination of the estimates of the Department of Transport. During the course of this morning's proceedings the chairman of that standing committee recognized the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport for the purpose of asking questions.

I submit to Your Honour that under the Standing Orders of this House, specifically Standing Order 55, the rules of the House shall apply in committees. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the government whip, whom I hear interjecting, was responsible in the first place for the ruling I shall refer to, so perhaps he should sit quietly and listen.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): I have not said anything yet.

Mr. McGrath: Shortly after Your Honour was elected Speaker by this honourable House, Your Honour made a ruling on a question of privilege that was raised by the hon. member for St. Boniface. As reported at page 1060 of *Hansard*, for November 5, 1974, Your Honour said, in part:

It is obvious, certainly, that members of the ministry ought not to enjoy the privilege of being able to both represent the government in answering questions in the House of Commons and, in turn, to use the time of the question period to ask questions.

Similarly, the privilege, of course, of being elevated to the position of parliamentary secretary falls only on those among the government ranks. This extends to those hon. members not only the recognition, prestige and advantage that comes from their position but the obligation of answering questions—

The examination of estimates in committees of the House is a question and answer procedure. I submit that the rules of the House as defined by Your Honour apply equally in committee as in this House. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport receives an extra emolument from the Crown, he occupies a special departmental office within the Department of Transport, and he takes a special oath of office under the Parliamentary Secretaries Act which gives him, of course, special privileges and responsibilities.

I submit to Your Honour that by virtue of the position that the parliamentary secretary enjoys, and equally by virtue of the fact that there will be occasions during examination of the estimates when the minister will not be present and the parliamentary secretary will have to stand in for him, the parliamentary secretary should not enjoy the same privileges as other members of the committee and be permitted to ask questions of his own minister. This is especially so when we consider that under the present Standing Orders of the House which deal with estimates, all estimates are deemed to have been reported on or before May 31, which places a particular responsibility, in regard to pressure of time, on members of the House who have to try to do the best they can with what I submit is an inadequate procedure at best.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization has before it at the present time the question of allocation of time and the practices of committees of the House. I submit that the ruling Your Honour made on November 5, 1974, dealing with the role of parliamentary secretaries and their position in regard to questions in the House ought to apply equally and with the same validity in the standing committees of the House.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I wish to support the point of order that has been raised by the hon. member for St. John's East. I point out that the parliamentary secretary in question has on a number of occasions stood in place of the minister as a witness before the committee. I foresee a danger in allowing this procedure to continue. The committee is an arm of this House, and if one rule applies to the House, traditionally it also applies to the committee. The reasoning behind your ruling as recorded at page 1060 of *Hansard* for November 5, 1974, is quite clear. It takes away the right of an hon. member to continue this game of charades, having the same person ask a question and answer it as well.