

*Oral Questions*

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. MacFarlane:** That is a lot of supposition.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse):** Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I would like to indicate my support for the observations made by my leader (Mr. Fortin) on the same point of order in the House for very special reasons which concern our democracy. Mr. Speaker, if we believe in this democracy, I think that we shall have to communicate to the whole population of Canada this belief of the parliamentarians, and parliamentarians are certainly entitled to know precisely what were the responsibilities of a minister when he was responsible for the management or the administration of a given department, even if his successor cannot reply to the questions of the parliamentarians or the members of the opposition, according to decisions made at that time by his predecessor.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is essential for us to know all the details surrounding this search, which has been recognized by its authors as being illegal. Even though this search was illegal and members of parliament know the exact nature of the break-in, this should not humiliate the minister in my opinion, but should make him more responsible and more willing to justify himself in the eyes of the public. But this is what the people want, through their representatives. Today, during whole question period, this very important issue was discussed while there are other questions that are also important and which interest the whole Canadian population. But even though I recognize that your role of Speaker is not always easy, you have to make a ruling and to decide if our rules allow such or such a minister to reply to questions asked by members of parliament during the question period even though he has not held the position involved for two, three, four or five years, as he is still a member of the same cabinet.

In my opinion, if we have to change our rules, we should do so, but we should give the opportunity to someone who is still a minister responsible in the cabinet to reply in this House to the questions asked by members of the opposition during the question period. I am convinced that if we follow this procedure, we shall give the public a better opinion of this institution in which we work.

What I consider above all else is that Parliament is the supreme authority in Canada, and if such supreme authority which we represent cannot obtain information on the activities of the executive power which is called the cabinet, I think it is a breach of democracy, and I fully support the remarks that the leader of the Social Credit Party of Canada has made in the House, absolutely not out of partisanship, something for which I could not care less. What I want to find out is whether, as parliamentarians, we will be able to secure information from the executive members who are in charge of the administration of our country, in whatever department.

[*English*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The point of order has been raised to which reference was made during the question period.

[*Mr. Hnatyshyn.*]

Of course, it was anticipated that this line of questioning would be put forward today and hon. members would endeavour to put questions to the hon. Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) in his former capacity as solicitor general.

There is nothing surprising to me in the presentation of those questions under the circumstances. There is nothing surprising to me in the atmosphere, the very charged atmosphere in the question period, or at the strength of the urgings that were put upon me to change what are well-established practices of the House. Under the circumstances, I do not think any of that is surprising. If we do not have these kinds of discussions in these circumstances in the chamber, then obviously members are not doing their jobs. Therefore, I fully expected all that took place today. That does not make my decision any easier. However, if there are no moments of difficult decisions, then this is not half the job people generally regard it to be. Therefore, I have to be expected to take difficult decisions from time to time. Whether I like the consequences of the decisions or not is really entirely aside. We have to try to maintain some consistency in our practices.

It has been indicated that on a previous occasion a question in these circumstances was permitted by the Speaker. The question was asked by the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) and was directed to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro). The minister was asked, having been the minister responsible for health at the time this report was initially produced and tabled, if he could explain why the House study was not initiated at that time. The question was answered by the minister when he said that he could not recall at the moment but would check into it with his colleague. That was the question and answer referred to in the precedent cited by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton. In a subsequent ruling on that I indicated that I do not have the power to prevent a minister from getting to his feet to answer a question. I never have that power; nobody has. Physically I have no power to stop a minister from getting to his feet to say something.

● (1540)

There are many, many circumstances which I was describing in the decision which I gave at that time. There are many discretionary rulings which the Chair has to make during the question period. It has happened to be my practice that I have not endeavoured to burden the House with the reasons for these decisions, which are made very quickly and often several times during the question period. Most members know when they have put a question which is largely argumentative, irrelevant, frivolous or which has some other disability. Members may not be as sensitive to that as the Chair, but we all basically know the difficulty when it occurs. If I were to get on my feet every time I ruled a question out of order and simply went on to another member to attempt to justify my reason, I think I could spend most of the question period doing that.

Hon. members know that I have those discretionary rulings to make. On the other hand, it is clear to me, and I think clear