

Oral Questions

often wonders whether a parliamentary secretary is rising to ask or to answer a question. That very fact is sufficient to pose a question in my mind. But as long as that privilege is not abused, perhaps we should not insist on a strict interpretation of the rule, whatever the rule may be. I would hope we might be able to continue on the basis of what we have done in the past.

My feeling is that, although the hon. member's point may be well taken to some extent, there must be some leeway allowed the Chair in the interpretation of the rules. That is what I have been trying to do, to take into account the point of view expressed by the hon. member, which has some validity, and the point of view which I take it the parliamentary secretary is now going to expound on the question of privilege.

Mr. Cafik: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you very much for the remarks you have made in respect of this matter. However, the point I wish to make is that in my capacity as a member of parliament I have constituents to represent. I intend to represent them and I will not be intimidated by anybody on either side of the House in the fulfilment of that responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cafik: The second point I would like to make is that I wish members in the official opposition would at least try to be consistent on this matter because, as others in the House realize, there are members on that side who think that parliamentary secretaries should not answer questions and others who think we should not ask them. The simple fact is that the rules allow us to do both, in my humble submission, provided a parliamentary secretary does not address a question to his own minister, which I think would indeed be an abuse of the House. I think that I am as entitled as anybody else to ask questions of anybody in a position of responsibility in the House of Commons, on any subject, in the interests of the people I represent, and I shall continue to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Yukon has made his point and the hon. member for Ontario has responded to the question of privilege. I am not sure whether we should allow the matter to develop into a debate. I recognize the validity of, and the interest in, the points of view expressed by both the hon. member for Ontario and the hon. member for Yukon. I am not sure that there is an easy solution, but I shall try to take both aspects of the matter into account.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, on a personal matter arising out of your remarks from the chair, I am sure if the Chair had heard me correctly you would have appreciated the fact that I was not advancing—and the record will show I was not advancing—the proposition that the question period should be reserved for the opposition. I said that the purpose of the question period was to enable the opposition, primarily—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[Mr. Speaker.]

Mr. Nielsen:—but including all members, to make inquiries of the ministry. Certainly at no time did I say the question period should be reserved for the opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We have now lost ten minutes or so on these questions or alleged questions of privilege. I point out that the hon. member for Brandon-Souris was waiting yesterday for a chance to ask a question. Before the first question of privilege was raised, the hon. member for Greenwood had the floor, so perhaps he might be allowed to ask his question. Then, with consent, the Chair will see the hon. member for Brandon-Souris who, as I say, was cut off at the end of the question period yesterday.

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**GOVERNMENT POSITION ON MAINTAINING MEMBERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL CONTROL COMMISSION, LAOS**

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my question is of a non-controversial nature. It is addressed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs who has not had too many questions today. Has the Canadian government threatened or considered withdrawing Canada's contribution to the International Control Commission in Laos unless certain conditions are met and, if that is the situation, what are those conditions?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we have not threatened to withdraw from the International Control Commission in Laos. What we have done is to advise the Laotian government, which we did on March 13, as well as the co-chairmen of the 1962 Geneva conference and all other parties, that we intend to move the adjournment *sine die* of the Laos commission at a meeting which we have requested for that purpose.

* * *

POST OFFICE**WAGE DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN POSTAL CODERS AND POSTAL SORTERS—REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION TO END CODE BOYCOTT**

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General, but he seems to have disappeared. In view of the fact that it has taken me as long to ask this question as it takes the Postmaster General's department to deliver the mail, perhaps I could address it to the President of the Treasury Board who is responsible for maintaining happy relationships in the Public Service. Now that the Union of Postal Employees has launched a postal code boycott in protest against the difference in wage rates between the postal coders and the postal sorters, would the President of the Treasury Board review this policy with a view to establishing equity between these two job classifications before Canada's unhappy postal service suffers complete collapse?