

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): It will still be soon, Mr. Speaker.

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FINANCE**REQUEST THAT SURPLUS FUNDS BE USED FOR HARBOUR AND WHARF IMPROVEMENTS IN ATLANTIC PROVINCES**

Mr. Charles E. Haliburton (South Western Nova): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance and is perhaps supplementary to one asked very early in the question period. In view of the surplus the minister has recently discovered in the Department of Finance, would he discuss with the President of the Treasury Board the possibility of earmarking even one-tenth of those unbudgeted funds for Atlantic harbour and wharf improvements? In particular, Mr. Speaker, I would make a plea in respect of the wharves in the constituency of Restigouche where I understand the member has been having great difficulty—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. That, of course, is a representation.

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[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION**POLICY RESPECTING SPECIAL AREAS—RESULTS OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN OTTAWA AND QUEBEC**

Mr. Irénée Pelletier (Sherbrooke): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct a question to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, but in his absence, I will direct it to his parliamentary secretary.

Does the minister intend to publish the results from his negotiations with—

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but—

[*English*]

the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond rises on a point of order.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, my point of order reflects somewhat on the point raised earlier about parliamentary secretaries asking questions, but I would draw your attention to the fact that it is certainly in violation of the rules for questions to be put to other than ministers of the Crown.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member might ask his question. I am not too sure whether the hon. member is right in respect of his point of order. I assume a question ought to be asked of a minister, but if the minister is not here someone might reply on his behalf. The hon. member might ask the question on this basis. He has been very patient for the last 45 minutes waiting for a chance to ask his question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. O'Connor.]

[*Translation*]

Mr. Irénée Pelletier (Sherbrooke): Mr. Speaker, I resume my question.

I would like to ask the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion and, in his absence, his parliamentary secretary when the minister intends to publish the results from his negotiations with the Quebec provincial government, and whether the present special areas and the possibility of designation of others have been mentioned during those negotiations?

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, the minister—

Mr. Speaker: Again I apologize to the hon. member.

[*English*]

The hon. member rises on a point of order.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I will continue rising on a point of order until these set-ups are stopped in the House. Again I insist. I believe rule 39(5) states—get out your book and read it—that there is no allowance in the rules for parliamentary secretaries to be taking questions. If the Prime Minister cannot indicate an acting minister, then let them wait with their questions.

● (1500)

Mr. Speaker: This point has been raised before and the Chair has indicated that there was a point of contention as to whether parliamentary secretaries should be allowed to ask questions when they answer questions as well. I have indicated before that I felt there appeared to be some measure of contradiction there. There was agreement at the time among hon. members that perhaps this was the kind of difficulty to which the House might apply its collective wisdom. But I think there is an established practice, which may be right or wrong, for parliamentary secretaries to answer questions. Perhaps that practice should be changed; perhaps it is wrong and questions should be answered by the Prime Minister or an acting minister. But certainly hon. members who have been here for some years know that on a number of occasions in the past parliamentary secretaries have replied on behalf of their ministers.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, may I draw your attention to Standing Order 39(5) on page 36, chapter V. It is specifically spelled out in the rules that questions are to be put to a minister of the Crown, and if the Prime Minister cannot indicate who is the acting minister, then I say it is time that the House stopped these set-up questions passed back and forth between Liberal backbenchers and parliamentary secretaries.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The point of order raised by the hon. member finds a degree of sympathy with me. As I said before, according to my interpretation of the rules, they do not prohibit a parliamentary secretary from asking a question or from replying to one. Again, we have had the