

Privilege—Mr. J.-P. Guay

hope that, respecting the subject matter of the debate today, we will keep interventions as brief as possible.

Mr. Cafik: There is no doubt at all that there is a long-standing tradition in the House according to which parliamentary secretaries have asked questions. I did so on many occasions in the last two years as parliamentary secretary. The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) said that the right of parliamentary secretaries to ask questions has been successfully challenged in the past. That is not true, to my knowledge. My right to ask questions has been challenged and I have always in the past been given that right by Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope I will be given that right in the future.

I think that it is understandable—this point has been alluded to by previous speakers—that parliamentary secretaries should not ask questions of their own ministers. Clearly, we have some special rights and obligations respecting our ministers. On the other side of the House, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), for whom I have a great deal of respect, has traditionally in the past raised questions regarding whether parliamentary secretaries should answer questions. But I have never yet heard him raise any question as to whether we have the right to ask them.

The point is that the opposition cannot have it both ways. Some members of the opposition do not want us to answer questions, and many of them do not want us to ask them in the first instance. But this is a change of rules in the middle of the tenure of a parliamentary secretary, and I do not think it is fair or reasonable to change the rules when members have accepted these posts with a certain understanding as to their rights and privileges in the House.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to give very careful consideration to this question. If it is the rule that we do not have that right, then I will raise a question of privilege based upon that ruling, because I think my rights as a member of parliament could be adversely affected.

Mr. John Roberts (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, I rise as one who is not a parliamentary secretary, although I once was and, for all I know, may be again. I rise as one who would not, even if I could, challenge the ruling of the Chair, but I take it that you have asked members who are interested to express their points of view, and I would like to take a few moments to do that. Parliamentary secretaries do have an opportunity, as do all backbenchers on the government side, through various party means to make their points of view known to ministers. That prerogative has never been used as an argument for taking away from them the right to ask questions of ministers in the House. There is a difference between the position of a parliamentary secretary and that of a minister. Ministers are collectively responsible for the presentation of government policy and programs; they speak with many voices.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: You're not kidding.

An hon. Member: From both sides of the mouth.

[Mr. Speaker.]

Mr. Roberts: Yes, they speak with many tongues, if you like; but they express a collective view for which they are responsible. Parliamentary secretaries are not part of the government; they are not part of the collective responsibility of the government; they are not bound by the obligation to speak with a common voice, as are members of the cabinet. Governmental responsibility, in so far as it exists, exists within the confines of the responsibilities of the minister whose parliamentary secretary one is. Outside the bounds of that responsibility the parliamentary secretary does not participate, nor does he have special access to the decision-making process of government.

But parliamentary secretaries have constituents and constituent interests which they should represent. I submit that it would be an extraordinary burden to place upon them to say they could not to be able to ask of ministers, as other members can, questions related to their constituencies or related to the interests of the country. Within the bounds of their departmental activities they do not have that right, but in the whole area of government they, as other members of the House, should have the right to ask for replies or to cross-examine ministers in the effective performance of their duties.

● (1530)

Mrs. Iona Campagnolo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, with great respect I submit that if it were your intention to deny those of us who have been appointed parliamentary secretaries the right to ask questions, I would suggest it would have been a very basic courtesy on your part at least to have apprised us—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Campagnolo:—rather than subject us to this public display of division in the House today.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Fairweather: What a rude woman.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, it so happens that when this issue has arisen on other occasions it has been my view that, provided they do not ask questions of their own departments, parliamentary secretaries should have at least a measure of right in the question period.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It seems to me, however, that an issue more important than that has arisen this afternoon. I refer to the authority and the prestige of the Chair.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I join the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) and others on this side of the House in protesting the fact that the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) and the