

*Privilege—Mr. Rae*

**Mr. Trudeau:** The hon. member does not want to talk about practical politics. In that case, I will tell him that in a better world, we would all be in heaven.

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

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Madam Speaker, I just want to warn the House with respect to a matter. The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) is here in the capacity of Acting Prime Minister. Traditionally, we have been able not to question ministers of the Crown with respect to their particular responsibilities, such as the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) with respect to the postmaster, etc.

We now have formalized a procedure which, I gather, was heretofore informal. There are now documents that have been tabled and have become part of the record of the House which indicate that certain responsibilities have been granted to certain ministers. I think it is well for the House to understand that what has happened is that, in terms of the question period, the questions with respect to specific subject matters can now quite properly be placed to ministers who have had some political responsibilities. I just think that the House should understand—I hope that was the intention of the Prime Minister—that if I had a particular matter relating to my area—for instance, in that list, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin), is very likely the minister responsible for my area—that I have a right, as a Member of Parliament—

**An hon. Member:** Nonsense.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** —to question the minister responsible for my area publicly—as well as by letter or behind the curtain, with respect to his area of responsibility.

If that is not the case, then this exercise today, and all the fine words of the Prime Minister, were masking a political boondoggle, and that is all it is.

● (1630)

**Mr. MacEachen:** I should like to comment on that point, Madam Speaker. I think one could have anticipated that the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) would want to expand the question period and make it even more chaotic. What he failed to notice was that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) indicated his method of organizing the government in order to make it a more efficient instrument. This has not changed in any way the responsibilities that ministers occupy under statutes to Parliament. It is under that canon that we respond to the House of Commons. The duties assigned to ministers under this system are duties assigned by the Prime Minister in the way he organizes his government. It seems to me that ministers in the discharge of those responsibilities are primarily responsible to the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Knowles:** Madam Speaker, I have been trying to get the floor for a few moments on precisely the point raised by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) to which the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) has made a response.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, you may be a bit disturbed as to other troubles you may have—if you do not have enough already—by the document the Prime Minister tabled today and made part of *Hansard*. We now have it official that certain of the responsibilities of ministers in the cabinet include various regions. He has told us, for example, that the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) is the minister responsible for the 14 constituencies in the province of Manitoba. He told my friend the hon. member for Winnipeg-St. James (Mr. Keeper) that if he is not satisfied with the answer he gets from the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) regarding a post office in that area, he can appeal to the minister responsible for his riding.

If I am not satisfied with the action I am getting from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) with regard to the Sherbrook-McGregor overpass I can put my question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration in his capacity as minister responsible for the 14 constituencies in Manitoba. I am trying to be letter perfect, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether I should say the minister for the Manitoba region or whether he is responsible for certain areas.

I admit readily Madam Speaker, not only do I admit, but I draw your attention to the fact that this contradicts what we have in the rule book. This is where your difficulties will increase. At page 133 of *Beauchesne*, fifth edition, citation 361, reads as follows:

A question may not be asked of a minister in another capacity, such as being responsible for a province, or part of a province, or as spokesman for a racial or religious group.

On page 132, citation 359(6) reads:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

There is no question in my mind about that rule; it has been there for a long time. I have seen members in this House of Commons from Nova Scotia try to put questions to the Minister of Finance when he held other portfolios. The Speaker always said he had no right to answer questions for his province but could answer questions only in respect of his department. I have seen other efforts to get certain ministers into an issue because it was important for the province or the region. You may tell me, Madam Speaker, and the Minister of Finance may say, that I have read the rule and the rule is there. I have read it, and it has been there for years. We have often been told by other Speakers we cannot put questions to a minister regarding something that is outside his responsibility. But no less a personage than the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has declared today that he has assigned responsibilities to his ministers for regions and responsibility for the ridings.

I know that we can play with these words both ways, but in point of fact, just as the Prime Minister has appointed persons as cabinet ministers with administrative responsibilities, so has he appointed cabinet ministers as persons responsible for ridings or groups of ridings or for regions. That is something new. We have not known that before.