

*Oral Questions*

left the impression with the House—I hope it was inadvertent; if it was not, he deliberately misled the House—that the idea of a debate on national unity was first proposed by him representing the government. So that we might be absolutely clear, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members that the first suggestion concerning this kind of intervention by the House of Commons did not come from the government but in fact came from the official opposition on more occasions than merely one.

The matter was first brought to the attention of the House of Commons by the hon. member for Victoria-Haliburton (Mr. Scott) on January 27, 1977 by way of a motion under Standing Order 26 because of the emergency situation which we felt had developed at that time.

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

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** The subject matter of that motion on that day was the failure of the government to counter the threat posed by the government of the province of Quebec. That was the first time this matter came before the House of Commons. On April 18, 1977 the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) again asked that the matter be brought forward. On March 30, 1977 the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Roche) asked that there be a debate in the House on this matter. Again on March 31, 1977 the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked that we proceed with that matter and deal with the problems of our confederation as well as the matters raised by the government ultimately in its motion, but as well on the basis of the social and economic problems facing this country.

Finally, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands raised the matter with the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on April 28, 1977. At that time the Prime Minister said he was favourably disposed to the idea. The proposal for the establishment of a committee and the involvement of parliament in this debate has been in existence for a long period of time. It was first raised by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and I hope it was not the intention of the government House leader to mislead the House when he indicated that he was the instigator of the idea. He was nothing of the sort; he sat silent.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** The government House leader said we had opportunities to raise this matter on allotted days. As a matter of fact, we did raise the matter on allotted days. On May 19 on a motion standing in the name of the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) we had a debate here on national unity and on the failure of this government with regard to economic and social programs which has led to much of the distress we have in this country. In addition, when the government finally acceded, we gave up one of our allotted days for the debate. We pressed for extended hours for this debate. I asked the government House leader if he would give up one more day for the debate. There was no answer.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** The reason this is important as a matter of privilege is that the government House leader knows I have pressed him. This is my personal matter of privilege. I have pressed him for a debate involving the kind of motion which was put in the amendment dealing with a parliamentary committee. I did this in various meetings we have had because I feel it is important. Like the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, I feel it is important that parliament be involved in an ongoing way. That was suggested in the motion put yesterday in the excellent speech by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark).

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

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Nothing that occurred between my friend, the government House leader, and me indicated that this would not be acceptable to the government until June 9, 1977 when I was advised that, notwithstanding the suggestions I had made and the pressure I had applied with regard to the form of the debate and the proposal of a committee, the government was reconsidering the motion it would put. I am now advised that while the Prime Minister initially felt that a parliamentary committee would be a good thing, it was the government caucus that finally indicated that it did not want to have that kind of intervention.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I am prepared to hear the hon. member on the question of privilege, but he is wandering to the debate on the subject matter.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** If the representation that it was the government which first dealt with this matter was innocent, and if the minister tells me that that is so, I accept that. However, if he is not prepared to say that, then I demand that he withdraw the statement that it was the government which first brought this matter forward because if he does not, the minister is misleading the House.

**An hon. Member:** Sit down.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** There is one other matter I want to raise.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I do not know if there are to be further contributions. By way of a question of privilege the hon. member has raised complaints about statements made by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) during the course of the question period this day.

**Mr. MacEachen:** Mr. Speaker, I regret that so much time is being taken away from the all-important question of national unity by a debate over an item which, whether it is decided in one way or another, is really not very crucial.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!