

*Parliamentary Secretaries*

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Parliamentary secretaries may deal with routine matters, but on questions of policy as important as this one, concerning the freedom of the individual, the only person who can answer in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs is the Prime Minister, or an acting minister.

The point of order I want Your Honour to consider is that parliamentary secretaries, having no responsibility or connection with the cabinet in any way, cannot answer for government policy or with respect to those matters encompassed by government policy.

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

[*Translation*]

**Miss Bégin:** On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs rises on a point of order.

**Miss Bégin:** On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make some clarifications. I am even tempted to call this a question of privilege since a strange situation exists from the fact that I am a female member of parliament and there is talk about the status of women in other countries, but I will not deal with that. On the same point of order, I want to state that, although the role of a parliamentary secretary may not be very well defined yet but will eventually be over the years, the fact still remains that I took an oath of office and limited myself to the answers which come under the functions of the minister whom the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) called upon me to assist. I would like to state that the multiculturalism policy is a known government policy for which a minister is responsible. It was implemented by this government and I did not broach the subject, thinking that the whole House knew it quite well.

Our human rights policy in that respect is just as clear. I answered what I think is not a routine question but a question of representations by a group which fits perfectly in the functions of a parliamentary secretary. I said and I can say the name of the person representing the group of women who will be coming to see me in 20 minutes if I can leave the House. I told Mrs. Hélène Dubois as soon as contact was made with my office that it would give me great pleasure to receive this afternoon the delegation she heads. It is not my fault if the object of the representation was communicated first to the opposition. I want to assure the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) that it is within the functions of parliamentary secretaries to do what I did.

[*English*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The right hon. member for Prince Albert has raised a point of order concerning the rights of parliamentary secretaries giving answers to questions that have been put to ministers specifically. In this particular instance it may be recalled that the question was put by the right hon. gentleman to the right hon. Prime Minister. The right hon. Prime Minister made an initial response to the question and then in turn referred the response to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Miss Bégin). I would

rather believe that that practice having been followed in this particular instance, it would be impeccable. The larger question has been raised, however, as to whether parliamentary secretaries in general have the power to respond for their ministers in their absence, particularly in respect of large policy questions which have been raised.

I know the matter has been considered in the past, but naturally I do not have the precedents involved at my fingertips for consideration. I would therefore like to take an opportunity to review them before making a larger pronouncement on the question.

**Mr. Trudeau:** On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, if you are going to consider this matter I would just make a remark. We would gladly be guided by Your Honour's decision in the future on this particular matter, but when studying the representation of the right hon. gentleman if you follow his suggestion of referring to the mother of parliaments, I would urge that you look at the situation there, Sir, and see that the ministry is much larger and of course the parliamentary secretary does perform a different role. We could avoid this by naming parliamentary secretaries to the positions of junior ministers as is the practice in the United Kingdom.

● (1510)

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if the right hon. gentleman wants to refer this to the mother of parliaments, as he puts it, it would be more reasonable to follow the practice there. The Prime Minister only appears in the House to answer questions every fortnight or so; again, these are written questions.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Twice a week.

**Mr. Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, if this were the situation, I should certainly be prepared to answer all questions, if they were written in advance and I had to come into the House only once a week or every two weeks.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** The Prime Minister in the U.K. does this twice a week.

**Mr. Trudeau:** If we are to refer to the situation in the U.K., Mr. Speaker, I hope you will look at the total picture. I am sure you will.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, apropos of what the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) just said, it is apparent, quite apart from remarks he made about the British parliament, that he has reserved to himself the right to make further submissions on this matter. If he is to be allowed an answer, I hope that we too will be permitted to answer and that there will be a full discussion before Your Honour rules on the point.

As to the Prime Minister's comment about parliamentary secretaries answering questions on behalf of ministries regardless of their size, let me say that perhaps this point is directed more to the competency of a ministry than its size.

**Mr. Speaker:** I assure all hon. members that before I make any ruling which could interfere with the practice