[*Translation*]

REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION OF PRIME MINISTER'S PROPOSAL CONCERNING INQUIRY

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. The Government is proposing an inquiry, to be conducted by a so-called independent investigator appointed by the Prime Minister. The inquiry's terms of reference will also be determined by the Prime Minister, by the same Prime Minister who announced last night that the Minister will be fully vindicated.

How does the Government expect us to believe that an inquiry organized by the Prime Minister would be preferable to, and as impartial as, an inquiry conducted in public by a committee of this House?

[*English*]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, that is the same question that was asked by the Leader of the New Democratic Party and by his own Leader. The same answer applies. The hon. gentleman is inferring in his question that there is no person of sufficiently high repute and integrity in this country who can conduct an impartial investigation. I do not accept that and I really do not believe that he, in his heart, believes that no such person can be found in Canada.

[*Translation*]

INQUIRY WHY GOVERNMENT WANTS TO CONDUCT INQUIRY OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, all I want is a straightforward answer. Why conduct an inquiry away from Parliament, headed by a Government appointee and operating under terms of reference determined by the Government? Isn't this just a way to cover up an affair that has become an embarrassment to the Government?

[*English*]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, after reviewing the questions that were received yesterday, I have given Hon. Members the assurance that whatever statements or allegations have been made in the House of Commons, however temperate or intemperate, will be the subject matter of those terms of reference. The Code of Conduct will be part of that. The Prime Minister's letter of September 9 will be a part of that reference. How much fairer can one get than to remove the matter from the bitterness and partisanship of the House of Commons to an impartial investigator who will make the report public, with the outstanding option of referring it to a committee? Is that not the fair course to follow in all the circumstances?

REQUEST FOR PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. Is he suggesting that it would not be possible to construct a panel of members from Members of the House of Commons who would be capable of conducting a fair and independent inquiry, as has always been the case in matters such as this?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, if we followed that course within our normal processes, and if the committee or panel were to come down with a favourable report, his colleagues would be the first to accuse the parliamentary majority of government Members and would call it a whitewash.

REQUEST THAT INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT BE REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, does the Deputy Prime Minister not recognize that he is prejudging the outcome?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deans: In the interest of satisfying the needs of Parliament, will the Acting Prime Minister make a commitment to the House today that the report of the independent inquiry, by a motion of the House will be referred to a committee of the House for study and that that report will deal only with factual information and make no recommendations of any kind?

• (1430)

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Surely it is the Hon. Member who is prejudging the matter, not I. Surely he would not wish an impartial person to investigate the facts in any constrained and limited way. Surely he would want to clothe that impartial person with the broadest possible terms of reference—

Mr. Broadbent: That's not what your regulation says. It's not what it says.

Mr. Nielsen: —including all of the matters which have been raised in the House of Commons with respect to these circumstances—

Mr. Deans: No.

Mr. Nielsen: —including everything which has been raised in the media, including the Code of Conduct—

Mr. Broadbent: Read the Prime Minister's letter.

Mr. Nielsen: —including the Prime Minister's letter. Surely the Hon. Member would not want to restrict those terms of reference but rather to broaden them.

[*Translation*]

REPLACEMENT FOR MINISTER WHO RESIGNED

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): My question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. When the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans resigned, he was replaced by the Deputy Prime Minister. When the Minister of National Defence resigned, he was replaced by the Deputy Prime Minister. This time, why