

Oral Questions

is the improvement of the committee system. We all hope to improve Committees in terms of their efficiency and usefulness. Should we now interpret the Government's position to mean that they may fulfil or attempt to fulfil that objective of improvement only so long as Cabinet Ministers decide what the political atmosphere is before they commence their work?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): No, Madam Speaker, because the new rules provide that a large number of reports will be sent to Committees automatically, and Committees will have a new opportunity to examine matters on their own, without waiting for a reference from the Government. So my comments do not in any way detract from the important reforms that have been made.

An Hon. Member: As long as you can stonewall them.

Mr. MacEachen: The point that I have made is a simple one, although the Hon. Member may disagree. It is that the atmosphere on this particular question has been, in my view, very heated and very extreme, and it is unlikely that at the present time an objective examination could be undertaken by a parliamentary Committee—

Mr. Nielsen: Better to get Mitchell Sharp to do it.

Mr. MacEachen:—of the guidelines. That is not in any way meant to undermine the importance of the parliamentary Committees. It is to acknowledge a fact that has been very obvious in this House for the past few weeks.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the Acting Prime Minister would tell us if there are other subjects which the Government will not refer to parliamentary Committees because there might be a political atmosphere in those Committees?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, if the Hon. Member can think of a subject he wants to ask about, I will give him an answer.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, I am interested in knowing what the policy of the Government is. It is saying that it is not going to refer to a Committee of the whole Parliament a question of morality which affects the reputation of this whole House of Commons, because there might be a political atmosphere in a committee of politicians. That is what he is saying.

Will he tell us whether it is the Government's intention to hold back other questions from parliamentary Committees because there might be a political atmosphere, or is this special

treatment only for a question which has to do with the dreadful, immoral conduct of Ministers of the Liberal Government?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member knows perfectly well that this matter has been dealt with by the House of Commons itself, and the House of Commons itself has rendered a judgment on the matter. I believe the Hon. Member is straining at a very obvious point, trying to make a point where one does not exist.

• (1450)

It is obvious that the Hon. Members of the Opposition are not really interested in examining these guidelines to determine whether they serve the public interest. That is not their concern. Their concern is to do the very opposite, that is, where possible to undermine and destroy reputations, which they have been systematically doing in the House of Commons, and they would not stop if the matter went to a Committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TEST OF GUIDELINES

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister with respect to the issue of the appearance of privilege and the answer given a few weeks earlier by the Deputy Prime Minister that it was up to the individual conscience of Ministers as to whether or not there was the appearance of a breach of guidelines. Is there no other test, other than the Ministers' consciences? If there is some other test, what is that test by which we can judge the guidelines?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, I think that point was covered last week in the discussions which were held. In the very conception of the guidelines it was the obligation placed upon individuals to live up to these guidelines. The onus was on the individual Minister and the former office holder in the first instance, and that obligation still exists. That responsibility still exists and it cannot be shifted. I believe that is a very important principle to be maintained, not only for Ministers but for Hon. Members of the House of Commons, that the responsibility in the first instance rests on them individually.

In addition to that, in the case of a Minister it is obvious that the Prime Minister on any occasion can decide that the Minister has stepped out of line. He can discipline that Minister or he can ask him to resign. The final sanction for Ministers rests with the Prime Minister. I wish there was a sanction on the other side which could be exercised by the Leader of the Opposition so he could discipline his Members.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!