

Privilege—Mr. Stanfield

proposed question of privilege I would like to reinforce what I said yesterday by stating that I think all three ministers should correct the record, because they have misled the House.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take very much time in order to deal with the points which have been made. I have been looking at the full question put on Monday, November 13, by the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield), and also at the answer given by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie), and I think that, in line with the reasoning advanced by the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas), the only justified comment that might be made about the answer given by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is that it might be regarded as incomplete.

I attempted to inform myself of this transaction before I came to the House on Monday because I anticipated there would be questions, and I remember quite clearly the question put at the time by the hon. member for Halifax and its significance, and, without doing violence to the substance of the question, I should like to abbreviate it thus:

Is he saying,—

Then there are some descriptive phrases—

—there is no financial responsibility on the Government of Canada in connection with this transaction by way of guarantee or otherwise?

It seems to me that the point is that in his reply the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources did not deal with “or otherwise”. I thought the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources prudently sidestepped in his answer, as I would have done, dealing directly with that point, because the hon. member for Halifax cut quite a swath in his question by asking:

Is he saying . . . there is no financial responsibility on the Government of Canada in connection with this transaction by way of guarantee or otherwise?

In other words, by guarantee or in any other way.

The minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear that this was a commercial transaction. It was negotiated and financed by normal commercial instruments. There are no government guarantees.

In so far as that statement is concerned and in so far as any answer I gave is concerned, I regard them as totally accurate. I believe the text will bear that out. The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands is correct in saying that that “or otherwise” was not followed up. I am sure the hon. member for Halifax might have asked a supplementary question which gave the answer, namely, that there might be a contingent liability.

I am not posing as an expert on all these financial matters, but I do believe that the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) is attempting to telescope two events, one which has taken place and one which might or might not take place in the future. There is a transaction that has taken place, and that transaction, in itself, as I understand it, has not created any contingent liability. Certain events—this is not basically my point, I just add that—would have to take place in the future before the actual contingent liability would be trig-

[Mr. Stevens.]

gered. That is something upon which hon. members might reflect.

● (1542)

To suggest that an answer in the House of Commons, which does not deal with every single point, raises a question of privilege, cannot be sustained. To say every single piece of information available in the stratosphere was not put forward in answer to a question is a question of privilege, cannot be sustained.

Perhaps the hon. member would have had a question of privilege if he argued that the minister had deliberately attempted to mislead the House. He did not do so. In so far as the minister's answers were concerned, he was totally accurate. When the hon. member for Halifax pinpointed his question in precise terms today, he received a precise answer. I suggest that if he put his question in precise terms on Monday or Tuesday, he would have received the precise answer.

At worst, which is not a very grave accusation against anyone, the answer to the question put by the hon. member for Halifax was incomplete. The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands put the matter in proper and true perspective in his analysis of the situation.

I do not think for a moment that the hon. member for Halifax or the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources are out to mislead the House or each other.

It was useful to have this clarification of what has been a rather abstruse point.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing abstruse about the point. The answer of the minister yesterday was very clear and definite. He said that there were no government guarantees. Today he said in an answer that there is a liability on the government.

Mr. MacEachen: Contingent.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): All right, I will deal with that. He said that there is a contingent liability on the government. That is the situation. My friend talked about the triggering of some future liability. There is no question of a triggering of a future liability whatsoever.

Mr. MacEachen: Yes, there is.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The liability exists now.

Mr. MacEachen: No.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The triggering depends upon some event which may occur in the future because the borrowing is taking place now.

Mr. MacEachen: The triggering would occur if Petro-Canada could not meet its obligations.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): That is the situation in which we find ourselves. If one looks at the answer given to the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) on November 13,