

Oral Questions

An Hon. Member: Where are you hiding him?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I recognize the Hon. Member for Oshawa.

ACCESS TO LIBERAL CAUCUS DELIBERATIONS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I too am deeply disturbed to find that the Prime Minister is not here. I acknowledge that Hon. Members on the other side have made the point that, from time to time, all Hon. Members are absent, but under the present circumstances, and since I am informed that his office did say that the Prime Minister would be here on a profoundly important matter, all I can do is express the deep regret of the Opposition and the people of Canada on this point.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Broadbent: I would like to ask a question of the Deputy Prime Minister since what is involved has everything to do with his present responsibilities as Deputy Prime Minister and as a member of the Privy Council. Considering that the Deputy Prime Minister has on record acknowledged that some years ago he had direct access to what was being said in the Liberal caucus and did so every Wednesday, and did not inform the Speaker at the time in order to have the alleged incorrect wiring corrected, and given that the Privy Councillor's oath has everything to do with the character of the Member, does the Deputy Prime Minister think such activity is compatible with being a member of the Privy Council and the Cabinet of Canada?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, over the 28-plus years that I have been in this place, this matter has been raised with each successive Speaker, from Speaker Macnaughton through the Speaker Lamoureux, Speaker Jerome, Speaker Sauvé, and Speaker Francis. On each such occasion the Speaker dealt with any current concerns such as those that were raised yesterday and are being raised now by the Leader of the New Democratic Party. You, Sir, gave your assurance yesterday that measures were being taken to meet those concerns. In any event, Mr. Speaker, the matter is properly within your jurisdiction and not that of the Government.

OATH OF OFFICE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, that answer is totally unacceptable. The Deputy Prime Minister is a member of the Privy Council and knows what that oath entails. When he was asked to be a member of the Cabinet by the present Prime Minister and was sworn in, did the Prime Minister ask him if there was anything in his past in terms of activities as a Member of Parliament about which the Prime Minister should be told before the Deputy Prime Minister was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council?

● (1120)

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Of course he did, Mr. Speaker. That is the practice of any Prime Minister who is worth his salt. My response to the Prime Minister, when he asked me that question, was the same as it is to the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party, that is, I have never done anything illegal or improper in my life, except being convicted once for going through a stop sign.

MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my last supplementary question concerns the adjective "improper", which the Deputy Prime Minister has just used. Does he consider that a Member of Parliament, who would systematically listen in or obtain information on a regular basis about what other caucuses are doing, in a process which would now be deemed to be illegal—does he consider this was appropriate activity for a Member of Parliament and for a man who was to become Deputy Prime Minister, and for him not to inform the Prime Minister of Canada that he had done that? Is that the proper kind of thing for a Member of Parliament to do?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the innuendo and allegations made in the preamble of the question put by the Leader of the New Democratic Party are absolutely false. They are simply not true.

Mr. Broadbent: Innuendoes cannot be true or false.

REQUEST THAT DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CONSULT PRIME MINISTER

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the Deputy Prime Minister, in view of his admission of repeated and regular eavesdropping on the Liberal caucus—

An Hon. Member: Not true!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Yes, that admission was made—whether, over the weekend—because we cannot put the question to the Prime Minister today, but we will face him here on Monday—

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): One way or another!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): —one way or another—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): —he will discuss with the Prime Minister whether, in view of conduct that is considered by most fair-minded Canadians to be unethical—

An Hon. Member: Immoral!