

at the time supported by the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think that in the past, similar questions were put to various ministers and those questions were answered.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the question is an important one, and we on this side of the House would like to know, first of all, why a reply to the question was not allowed. The government may or may not answer a question. Although, this government doesn't make a habit of answering them, the question was put quite clearly. We fail to see why the hon. member did not receive a reply to his question. We would like to know why the Chair did not allow a reply, and we would like the government's opinion. Are they prepared to answer the question, yes or no? That's all.

[English]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I am looking for the right citation in Beauchesne's. I just cannot put my finger on it at the moment.

Quite clearly the purposes of Question Period are to provide the opposition with an opportunity to obtain information about the actions, programs, or policies of the government. They have to do with the competence of the government.

Questions about what members of the government in their other capacity as members of a political party in discussion somewhere else are not relevant to the government. They simply are not, as provided in the rules, in Beauchesne's, about the purposes of Question Period.

Your Honour was exactly correct in suggesting that it is not proper to put to members of the government questions pertaining to discussions held that do not deal with the responsibilities of cabinet ministers under their Privy Council oath, do not deal with responsibilities of ministers in respect of their departments, do not deal with decisions or actions of the government, but in fact deal with the actions of a political party to which members of this government belong.

Privilege

Those are actions and decisions of the political party; they are not actions and decisions of this government. Hence they are not appropriate for Question Period.

As to the generalized supposition that these issues of constitutionality and so on are important to the country and should be debated in the House, indeed they are. There are all kinds of appropriate fora or occasions for the discussion and debate of such issues in this House.

Question Period is not the appropriate time. It is not provided under the rules that members of the government should be called to account and questioned about actions they participated in as members of a political party. It is simply not appropriate for Question Period.

[Translation]

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last week, we were all very pleased to let the Prime Minister speak on the future of Canada. Now, a minister of the Crown says that he does not have the right to answer the question put to him by another member regarding Quebec's ability to decide its own future, its self-determination, when it is clearly a legitimate question for the government. I am quite sure that the Quebec lieutenant of the Prime Minister would like, with unanimous consent, to clarify the matter. I am convinced he is willing to do so— I remember very well, Mr. Speaker, that when we were the government, we were asked questions on our policies, like the one regarding cruise missile testing. From time to time, political parties have messages for the government.

I would think that the question is in order, and that members of this House would be willing to set the rules aside in order to give the minister a chance to speak on this most important question for the people of Quebec. I would like to have unanimous consent for this. Are we ready to give it?

[English]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton East, with reference to my ruling of a few minutes ago, has asked if the House would give the unanimous consent for the minister to answer the question. Let me make it very clear: the hon. minister does not need unanimous consent to answer the question.