● (1410)

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we would support the proposal that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, making it clear that we are not in this reference going into the question of the use of unparliamentary language. We feel that is in the hands of the Chair and that we should not deal with that aspect of the matter in the standing committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I should also like to confirm discussions which have taken place between parties concerning the recent point of order resulting from the last incident.

I should like to say that we endorse the remarks of hon. members for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). The problem is of course a major one which often causes embarrassment to the Chair and to hon. members. Ministers have got into the unpleasant habit of making statements outside the House which, as is generally known, prevents hon. members from actually giving the impression, let alone the reality of a responsible government reporting on its policy.

We are inconvenienced because of that situation, Mr. Speaker, and no doubt the efficient and profitable work carried out by the Committee on Procedure and Organization will be useful in clearing up the matter, of course, assisted by the advice and comments of the Chair.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to seize the opportunity to say that the oral question period, which lasts only 40 minutes, is now under review in the committee, with the purpose of improving it according to your pertinent suggestions. Nevertheless, our party deplores increasing use of the question period for rising on questions of privilege which are often unjustified and on points of order, thus depriving many hon. members of their right to put pertinent questions to ministers.

The last incident which took place this week caused us to lose over 12 minutes of the oral question period, with practically no result. We have now unanimously decided that the matter be referred to the Committee on Procedure and Organization.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that in future committees will be allowed to carry out their tasks and that the oral question period will really be used for the purpose it is meant to serve, namely to allow opposition members to force the government to report on its action, as befits any responsible system.

[*English*]

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few brief comments on the suggestion of the hon. member for Peace River. I certainly underline the point made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that this suggestion is not, in my opinion, intended to deal with the question of unparliamentary language, nor is the acceptance of any such reference to a committee to be regarded as embodying any alteration in the standards that have been accepted by the House.

I would make the further comment that in my opinion the question of statements by members outside the House embraces more than just the question of statements by ministers of the Crown. It certainly would be improper to have one category of statement made outside the House subject to comment within the House and another category of statement made outside the House not subject to comment.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Baldwin: That is why I used the word "members".

Mr. MacEachen: That is why the hon. member for Peace River has used in the wider expression, "by members outside the House". Similarly, the problem in respect of the electronic media applies, of course, to ministers of the Crown, but it also applies to all other members including the Leader of the Opposition and leaders of the other parties who are free, if they wish, to amplify outside the House comments made in the House.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Not revised as the government did.

Mr. MacEachen: We accept the notion of the right hon. gentleman that all the evil rests with this side of the House and all the virtue rests on that side. At one time I thought it was only those at the far end of that side of that House who wrapped themselves in the cloak of virtue, but the right hon. member for Prince Albert is doing that today.

Aside from these comments, Mr. Speaker, we think it might be useful for the committee to look at these questions, and if its members come forward with useful suggestions the procedures of the House would probably be improved.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I never realized before that statements made on television in the extramural performances that take place from time to time represented anything in the nature of government policy. What is objected to is the fact that ministers find themselves making one statement in the House that is not in accordance with the facts—I had better be careful what I say because I might arouse the eggshell sentimentalities and feelings of those opposite. I will put it this way. Some of those ministers who indulge in terminological inexactitude on occasion—this is within parliamentary tradition—state things to be true that one can only say are the very antithesis of the truth as represented by them and bring down parliament because this is where ministers should be answering, not revising outside the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I appreciate the suggestions that have been made by the hon. member for Peace River and other House leaders in reference to the incident which I think has caused much anguish to many of us, certainly to the Chair. I have already mentioned that to hon. members. I have suggested from the beginning that, in my way of thinking, there was more than one issue involved here and perhaps the most fundamental issue was the question of references that might be made in the House to speeches made outside the House by members of the government—or others, if that will please the President of the Privy Council. I had hoped that if we could clear up that difficulty by making it the object of a study by the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, at the same time we might solve the other problem.