

question is unfounded and that we should not waste any more of the time of the House.

[English]

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Madam Speaker, since this question of privilege has been brought before the House today, I have two or three brief comments to make but I will not pursue them further. However, I would ask, if it is to be pursued further, that we have a fuller explanation of the comment made by you, as reported on page 12267 of *Hansard*, which reads:

Order, please. The President of the Privy Council is authorized to answer questions if he so chooses on questions of that nature.

I want to make it clear, Madam Speaker, that I did in fact rise in my place. I was prepared to answer the question. I was able to do so, I think, in the first instance rather than in the last instance.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, this is a matter of considerable importance, and whether it is referred to the committee or not, I think it must be dealt with.

The question whether or not a member who is chairman of a committee is entitled to answer directly and without interference is of vital importance to the operations of the House. I think it is understood by everyone in this House that there is a difference between a question put to a member of the Privy Council or to a member of the cabinet, the right of a more senior cabinet minister to rise and answer a question and a question put to a private member who, in his or her responsibility as chairman of a committee, is asked to comment on a matter that is legitimately before a committee.

In looking over the precedents that I can find, I do not believe there is anything to justify interference by any member of the cabinet in the right of a private member who has been asked a question and who is legitimately entitled to answer it. Nowhere in our precedents can I find where a cabinet member, a minister, the President of the Privy Council or anyone else is entitled to pre-empt an individual private member.

I hope the Chair will rule that way. I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will simply rule that it is appropriate to ask, it is appropriate to answer; that it is inappropriate for any member of the House of Commons to attempt to gain the floor to answer a question addressed to someone other than someone within the cabinet. If the Chair can rule in that way, I will be delighted. If, however, you feel that the matter is necessary to be reviewed outside of the House and then referred back, I would support the motion of my colleague, the House leader for the official opposition.

Madam Speaker: Has the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) completed his intervention? He asked me to clarify something I said yesterday. I can tell the hon. member that I will clarify what I said when I make my ruling, but if he has some arguments to offer, I would be glad

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to hear him. I have to tell the hon. member that I shall not explain myself until I make a ruling, as I do not want to rule today but will reserve my decision on this matter, if he has a few arguments to advance which he has not yet had a chance to do, I will hear him now.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): No, Madam Speaker. However, I do want to make it clear that I was not in any way casting any reflection on what you said, because I know that in the heat of question period, and with much noise in the House, it is sometimes difficult to hear anything. I simply made that statement following what the House leader of the official opposition had to say on his question of privilege. I think he has made the arguments I would have made so I will not go into it in any further detail.

● (1530)

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Madam Speaker, on this particular question I think it comes down to the point that when an hon. member asks a question and there are two members getting up, as was the case yesterday involving the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), who had not been addressed but volunteered to stand, it is up to the Chair to make a choice. There is no way that the Chair should decide that other than that the member who was asked the question should answer. There is no impediment whatsoever in the way of a chairman of a committee replying to questions relevant to procedures of that committee. It is an established rule of this House that a chairman of a committee may be asked questions relevant to the procedures of the committee.

I think on serious reflection that the President of the Privy Council is not the man to determine what is happening in a committee and that the person who was being asked was being asked in his proper capacity. If he says he will not answer, as a minister can do, that is the end of it. Beyond that there is no cabinet minister, not even the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), who can, shall we say, usurp the function or position of a committee chairman.

Madam Speaker: May I ask the hon. member if he will help the Chair by answering this query I have in my mind. If the hon. member will read the questions as they were phrased yesterday by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley-Hants (Mr. Nowlan) and the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), he will find that there might be a double interpretation. Two members having risen in order to answer the question, in order for the Chair to decide who is to answer the question the Chair would have to interpret the question. Would the hon. member feel that the Chair has to go so far as to interpret the question?

Mr. Lambert: Madam Speaker, I speak subject to correction, but if memory serves me correctly the chairman of the committee was asked whether he had sought permission from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) for the expansion of a question which had been proposed. The President of the Privy Council sought to, and did, intervene. Ultimately the answer