

**Senator MacEachen:** Honourable senators, the Auditor General, following the meeting which he held yesterday with the Prime Minister, stated that everything that was a problem before regarding Petrofina was now out of the way. That is what the Auditor General said, and we all know that the Prime Minister himself has clarified precisely what the problem was, namely, that it was not appropriate for the Auditor General to have access to a cabinet document. All that I am really asking is whether that principle, which has been enunciated not only by the Prime Minister but also by his predecessors, is still to be observed by the government?

**Senator Roblin:** I do not believe that I can add anything to the statement I have already made on the subject.

**Senator MacEachen:** Honourable senators, I am sure that the Leader of the Government will agree that his statement has not really dealt with my question, except to say that there was a meeting and that an effort would be made to define what a cabinet document is. Well, we do not need a definition. We know precisely what cabinet documents are—

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Senator MacEachen:**—and it would be quite unfortunate if the Prime Minister attempted to define a cabinet document—

**An Hon. Senator:** Tell us.

**Senator MacEachen:**—as something that is a departmental document.

I ask the question because it is a convention of government that the present Prime Minister has no authority to make available cabinet documents that were the possession of the former government. I am asking whether it is the intention of the Prime Minister, following the meeting with the Auditor General, to maintain the convention which he so stoutly defended within the last short period of time?

**Senator Roblin:** Honourable senators, I believe that where my honourable friend and I would have a difference of opinion is as to whether or not there is a satisfactory definition of what is a cabinet confidence. I believe that is the heart of the matter, namely, that there has been a claim made by some that certain papers, which I would regard as being departmental and not cabinet confidences, are indeed covered by the stamp of secrecy. In fact, I understand that some departmental papers have been marked "secret" even though they are not, in any usual way, considered to be cabinet confidences; and that has been part of the stumbling block in connection with this matter.

I have to be candid with my honourable friend and say that I am not a principal in these discussions, and therefore I must be careful not to try to say something about which I do not really know. That is why I believe it would be a good idea for me to wait until there has been a further statement by the Auditor General and the Prime Minister with respect to this matter.

**Senator MacEachen:** Honourable senators, I agree with the Leader of the Government that the Prime Minister, up to the present time, has not commented upon his meeting. It has been

the Auditor General who has made the statements. I understand the sensitivity of the question and the explanation given by the Leader of the Government, but it would be helpful if he could, at an early date, clarify precisely what the situation is as to whether, indeed, the government has now decided to release departmental documents, which is a question quite separate from the question of cabinet documents. That really is what I would like to know about. Also, if cabinet documents are to be made available, has the consent of the former Prime Minister been received in order to make those disclosures?

**Senator Roblin:** Honourable senators, I understand the reasons why my honourable friend is so sensitive on this issue. I can appreciate his concern. However, I think that he may perhaps possess his soul in patience for a few days until further information is forthcoming on this matter, because I have some confidence that the answer will meet his requirements.

**Senator MacEachen:** Honourable senators, I am sensitive about the question of proprieties. If the honourable gentleman was inferring that I was sensitive about the disclosure of information, then I would want to set his mind at ease on that matter. I am sure that he did not have any such inference in mind.

## RESTAURANT OF PARLIAMENT

### PROVISION OF SERVICES

**Hon. Peter Bosa:** Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. It arises out of a recent announcement by His Honour the Speaker of the House of Commons affecting the administration of the Restaurant of Parliament.

I am a member of the Standing Joint Committee on the Restaurant of Parliament. I am sure that the honourable senator knows that this restaurant has come under a great deal of criticism over the past number of years as being an institution where parliamentarians take advantage of heavily subsidized meals.

Over the past few days and as a member of the committee, I took it upon myself to consult with some experts in private enterprise in this area of endeavour. I discovered that there are great advantages to be derived from putting out to tender the services that are rendered at the present time by the Restaurant of Parliament. Is the honourable gentleman aware if his government has ever considered the possibility of putting out to tender the restaurant services on Parliament Hill?

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, my honourable friend has posed an interesting suggestion and I hope that he will follow it up. However, I think the suggestion should be put before the joint committee responsible for the restaurant, which is co-chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate. Therefore, the question is not one which falls within my purview, but my honourable friend may find it useful to take the matter up with the committee and with the joint chairmen.