

not in accordance with the traditions of this House or of any parliamentary democracy. It is a long established practice in Canada, going back for many years, that questions are essentially, or basically, the privilege of members of the opposition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The other point is perhaps a little more subject to controversy—whether parliamentary secretaries have the same right as members of the opposition or as backbenchers on their own side to ask questions during the question period. I must say I have some reservations about this point. It seems to me that if parliamentary secretaries are to be recognized as having authority to speak on behalf of the government in reply to questions, it is debatable whether they ought to be given the privilege of asking questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1500)

Mr. Speaker: This is the aspect which worries me somewhat. The hon. member for Yukon and others have raised this matter before. I am not clear in my mind, because the points made by the hon. member for St. Boniface are worth considering and the points made by the hon. member for Yukon and others on his side are also worthy of consideration. I have been thinking of this problem for some years now and there seems to be no solution except, perhaps, to count on the discretion and co-operation of parliamentary secretaries not to ask questions too often. I have tried in a subtle way not to encourage them too much to ask questions, and I will continue that practice as much as possible. I realize there are arguments that may be made in support of the proposition advanced by the hon. member for St. Boniface today, and by the hon. member for Saint-Denis and the hon. member for Ontario.

However, perhaps the question should be whether it is proper for a parliamentary secretary to ask a question rather than whether the rules and practices of the House give him the right to do so. I should like to reserve the question. I will take it under advisement and perhaps some day it can be resolved to the satisfaction of all hon. members, including backbenchers to my right and distinguished parliamentary secretaries. The hon. member for Yukon and others might have noted that when the hon. member for St. Boniface was given the floor a moment ago the question period had expired. That is a point that the hon. member for Yukon and others might like to take into consideration.

This having been said, perhaps in fairness to a few members to my left and to my right in the back benches who have been trying to ask questions we might recognize two or three for quick questions before calling orders of the day.

[Translation]

Mr. Prud'homme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member on a point of order.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I am of course with you when you say that one ought not to put questions to the minister whom one represents as parliamentary secretary, but before you make a decision that might affect the rights of members in future, and set up new precedents, I must say that I do not see why we should not exercise our privilege of addressing questions to other ministers, just like any other member.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker,—and this is in reply to a remark by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen)—if government members can ask a minister for information simply by picking up the phone, I suppose that there is nothing to prevent any opposition member from doing the same. I could easily reply any time to the hon. member for Yukon on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to respectfully point out to you, before you make a ruling, that if a parliamentary secretary or anybody else asks questions to a minister from whom he could get answers over the phone this is likely to inform the public.

If the hon. member for Yukon directs a question to a minister it is because he expects that a reply will be given in the House so as to permit reporters to inform the population. Questions from the opposition to ministers could easily be asked outside the House—

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[English]

AIRPORTS

MOUNT HOPE—POSSIBILITY OF AREA MEMBERS ATTENDING MEETING BETWEEN HAMILTON CIVIC AIRPORT COMMITTEE AND MINISTER OF TRANSPORT

Mr. Sean O'Sullivan (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport and arises from a news account carried in the *Hamilton Spectator* late last week. Is the minister planning to meet tomorrow members of the Hamilton civic airport committee? If so, would he consider allowing members from the Hamilton area to join the Minister of Labour in attending the meeting?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I have just been told that they have asked for an interview tomorrow but I do not know at what time. I shall have to discuss the matter with the minister from Hamilton.

Mr. O'Sullivan: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, which perhaps I could direct to the Minister of Labour. Would the minister advise whether other Members of Parliament from the Hamilton area will be allowed to attend the meeting?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, what happened, I think, was that the chairman of the civic airport committee was in touch with members of my staff to see whether a meeting could be arranged between the committee and the Minister of Transport. Following that, I believe we got in touch with the minister's office, but I