

*Question of Privilege*

2. If so, has work on this project begun? If not, when will it begin?

● (5:00 p.m.)

My question of privilege arises from correspondence just delivered by hand to my office, and the particular letter I refer to reads as follows:

April 1st, 1966.

Dear Mr. MacInnis:

I regret the necessity of returning the two attached questions for the Order Paper which you handed to me this afternoon.

I have discussed both these questions with His Honour, the Speaker, and I have been instructed by Mr. Lamoureux to indicate to you that it is his opinion that they contravene recent rulings made in the house with respect to the form in which questions should be placed.

It is His Honour's opinion that it is not in order to make inquiries of a minister in areas other than those covered by his administrative responsibilities.

My question of privilege arises out of a long standing practice that ministers, unless they designate otherwise, in speaking outside the House of Commons are speaking for the government. It is directly related to the ministers to whom the questions were addressed, namely the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen), and the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Robichaud).

I would direct your attention, Sir, to the second question I placed on record, where I said, "the Minister of National Health and Welfare and/or the Minister of Fisheries" pertaining to a matter directly under the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Minister of Fisheries. My questions have now been ruled out of order by the same process by which questions I asked during orders of the day over the last several weeks were ruled out of order, namely that it is not the minister's responsibility.

Apparently, sir, I have been labouring under a misapprehension because seemingly government ministers can go outside the house and make any or all statements they wish without accepting responsibility. However, I do not think I have been wrong in interpreting government responsibility and ministerial responsibility in these cases.

Therefore I firmly suggest, with all due respect to you, sir, that the rulings on the particular questions I put forward today give me a bona fide question of privilege to press for answers from the ministers who made these statements, since the statements were made without any indication that they were not speaking on behalf of the government, and especially with respect to the second

[Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South).]

question where I stipulated, "and/or the Minister of Fisheries" who is directly responsible in this particular field.

The ruling that has been given today is a carryover from questions asked on orders of the day, and I say to you, sir, it is not in keeping with the practice that has been followed throughout the years that ministers making statements outside the house should be held responsible for them.

**Mr. Speaker:** I can assure the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. MacInnis) that I do not want to discriminate in any way against him. The questions that he sought to place on the order paper were perhaps borderline to some extent, but I did feel they were an attempt, bona fide I am sure, to contravene the ruling which I made a few days ago, in which I firmly believe, and in which I believe I have been reinforced by the studies I have made in recent days of the situation in past months, and, I should say, in past years.

I realize that ministers should be held accountable in some way for statements they make outside the house, but my understanding of the rules and the practice—and there are a number of precedents on this—is that the Prime Minister can be asked whether a statement of policy made outside the house by a cabinet minister does in fact reflect the policy of the government. In this way the minister can be held accountable for a statement of policy which he makes outside, or indeed inside, the house.

I still feel today just as strongly as I did a few days ago that it should not be the policy in the house that ministers be asked to answer questions, whether written questions or verbal questions, in any capacity other than in their official capacities. While considering this matter in recent days it was brought to my attention—and I must say I understood this—that in some instances certain ministers are given areas of responsibility. For example, I might say that the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Turner) in the present government is given, by acknowledgement on the part of the government, that portion of government responsibility in the realm of transport, is asked questions in that regard, and is expected to answer questions about the Department of Transport although he is not the Minister of Transport.

What I fear is that if we were to adopt the suggestion made by the hon. member for Cape Breton South, which may have been followed in some instances—I appreciate