

Oral Questions

on. There is no denial of that. But the hon. gentleman has been in government for some time, probably longer than I have, and if he could stand up as head of a government anywhere, particularly one of this size, and guarantee that there would be no discrepancies anywhere at any time, then, of course, his credibility would suffer badly.

Mr. Stanfield: The whole thing has been a con job.

DATE AUDITOR GENERAL INFORMED OF INTENTION TO
APPOINT ROYAL COMMISSION

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, as the resident historian, I want to get my perspective sorted out. On what date was the Auditor General apprised of the government's intention to appoint a Royal Commission?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): I cannot give the precise date.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Andras: I know that when I took over this portfolio I met with the Auditor General within a few days thereafter, ten days, perhaps. I know that this question of accountability, the whole area of the concern I have been expressing, along with our desire to improve financial management was the subject of considerable discussion. The Auditor General himself made reference to those discussions in his report. I talked to him about ten days afterward and phoned him later about the different ways in which we might proceed. I cannot give the hon. member the precise date upon which he indicated his agreement, but it was within the last month anyway.

Mr. Fairweather: I am reading a book entitled "The Civil Tongue" which discusses just the issue the minister raises—

An hon. Member: Read it. You need it!

Mr. Fairweather: Well, it is a pity a good many ministers wouldn't read it because it talks about plain language. It is part of the problem that nobody believes this government—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fairweather: Good afternoon!

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton.

Mr. Fairweather: Am I not to be allowed a supplementary question?

Mr. Speaker: I was distracted by some comment which the hon. member for Fundy-Royal directed toward the Chair, I thought. I was not sure what it was.

Mr. Fairweather: Oh, no. I am very sorry, Mr. Speaker. I am the last one . . . I was wishing you a happy afternoon. I

[Mr. Andras.]

was. It's a funny custom in Fundy-Royal. Courtesy, it is called.

The Auditor General, as it happens, is a person who reports to parliament, not to the ministry, and that is why I am interested in knowing at precisely what time the Auditor General knew it was the government's intention to pass the buck and appoint a Royal Commission to try to extricate the government from the dilemma in which it finds itself.

Mr. Andras: I am not sure as to the inference of the hon. member's preamble with regard to the Auditor General being an officer of parliament. Is it that the Auditor General, being an officer of parliament, is not entitled to talk directly to ministers—

Mr. Fairweather: Read the blues and figure out a better answer.

Mr. Andras: He indicated in his report that he has had many such discussions, and I think that is very constructive and very proper. I regret I cannot give the hon. member the exact hour and date when that decision was discussed. I know I have had discussions with him; I know that my predecessor and other Ministers of the Crown had discussions with him. But he did welcome the suggestion.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which affects all members of this House. It has to do with misleading statements made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs on November 16 during the question period.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member will be aware that in order to raise any question of privilege which does not arise out of circumstances which took place during today's sitting, he would have to give the Chair notice, in conformity with the provision of the Standing Order.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. BROADBENT—REQUEST THAT PRIME MINISTER MAKE
STATEMENT ON MOTIONS ON QUEBEC ELECTION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege concerning a subject about which I have given Your Honour notice. I do not take this course lightly; I have raised a question of privilege on very few occasions during the eight years in which I have been here as a member of parliament.

In my view, the principal justification for a question of privilege is that an act has taken place which impinges upon the capacity of members of parliament to do their job. In my view, that is the essence of a legitimate question of privilege—not that a member is unhappy about something or disagrees with a particular decision. I might say, in passing, that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) might be interested in what I have to say since my question of privilege pertains to actions taken by the Prime Minister himself. The crucial point is that the rights and privileges of members of parliament to exercise their function have been trespassed upon.