

*Oral Questions*

The refusal of the minister to answer questions, on which the hon. member was beginning to comment, is indeed a matter for fair comment. However, it does not constitute a point of order in view of the fact ministers that have the right at all times simply to refuse to make answers.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, I would not quarrel with your comment in respect of this matter because I think you have stated the obvious in a very clear and succinct way. What I would like to say is that it would be very helpful to this House, in view of the matters in which we are involved as well as those previously before us, if Your Honour could give us the benefit of your reflections on the sub judice rule so that it will at least be clear that the minister's refusal to answer our questions can have nothing to do, from a procedural viewpoint, with anything directly before the courts.

**Mr. Speaker:** I hope I made that perfectly clear. I should say to the House that in light of the establishment of the committee, of which evidently I will be the chairman, which has been brought into existence largely at the instigation and initiative of the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), which I think will inquire into the rights and immunities of members of the House of Commons, I had intended to reserve any further comment, unless it was necessary, with respect to the sub judice rule. I hope that will be one of the first matters the committee will examine.

I think I made it clear in the circumstance with respect to the case of the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay), that there would be no interference with his right, or the right of other members, to put questions reflecting on that matter unless and until it was at trial, and perhaps not even then.

With respect to questions put to the ministry in this matter, I have again made it clear there has been no interference with hon. members under the sub judice rule. If I were to attempt to interfere with the right of a member and get into difficulty there, it might be necessary to interpose some discussion and a finalization of that. However, up until the time there is some difficulty with the right of members to put questions, the position is clearly understood. Certainly at the moment that point has not arrived.

**Mr. Lawrence:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. May I ask Your Honour to direct your mind to one brief question? It relates not only to the sub judice rule but to the question of privilege. When Your Honour is directing your consideration to this matter, would you direct it to one further question, a small one?

As I understand the position of the Chair it is that ministers do not have to reply. However, if they do reply that is the end of the matter as far as the Chair is concerned. May I simply ask this: if a reply comes which is quite patently false to the knowledge of the Chair and the knowledge of hon. members of the House, surely that is a matter of misleading the House and is obviously a question of privilege before the House? Could Your Honour direct your consideration to an answer coming from the ministry which is patently false?

**Mr. Speaker:** That consideration, of course, also involves a great deal of judgment which would have to be exercised in the circumstances.

● (1520)

[Translation]

**Mr. Guay (Lévis):** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Following the oral question period this afternoon, I wish to point out to the House that more than 40 Liberal members met the directors of the Agricultural Producers' Union yesterday, and it has not been seen fit, after the very amiable discussions that took place—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Guay (Lévis):** Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. member for Lévis (Mr. Guay) on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Guay (Lévis):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to set the facts straight. After this meeting attended by 40 Liberal members and four ministers from the province of Quebec, it has not been seen fit to ask to meet the Prime Minister—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Fortin:** Mr. Speaker, I raise the question of privilege.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Fortin:** Mr. Speaker, if it is possible to turn a point of order into a question of privilege, I feel also that my rights are encroached upon. The farmers probably knew that the Liberals are stronger in caucus than in the House of Commons, this is perhaps why this morning they took up the matter strongly with the Social Crediters.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Rondeau:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) took advantage of a slip of the tongue to refrain from answering one of my very serious questions, to wit whether he would be willing to meet a representative of the dairy industry.

Since the farmers have attempted to—

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. member for Shefford understands quite well that the Prime Minister has indeed answered that question this afternoon during the oral question period and if he has anything to say on the content of the answer given, it is not through a point of order or a question of privilege.

**Mr. Rondeau:** Mr. Speaker, I merely want to know whether the Prime Minister will meet the representatives of the dairy industry as readily as he met the Canadian bishops last week?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.