

Business of the House

could go on eternally. I think there is a responsibility on both sides of the House to try to bring this matter under control. I invite the President of the Privy Council to indicate as soon as possible what the point is that he wants to make. He has had the floor now for some time.

Mr. MacInnis: I am rising on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Why don't you go home?

Mr. MacInnis: Keep on braying. Since I have been recognized by the Chair I do not intend to compete with the braying on the other side.

The House leader is now trying to mislead every member of the House by saying that he read the question of the hon. member for Calgary Centre and made no comment. The record will show that the House leader clearly made comments on the very statement he read into the record.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I will advise hon. members that I will allow the President of the Privy Council to conclude his remarks briefly. I will hear no further about this matter. It is just as simple as that.

Mr. MacEachen: May I point out to you, Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, that the opposition parties put up five members on this subject who continued until well after three o'clock. From the moment I rose to my feet I have occupied only a small part of the time. It has been mainly occupied by members of the opposition. I ask Your Honour to reconsider whether it is fair to this side of the House to ask me, in light of the time elapsed, to conclude my remarks briefly.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is fair and I invite the President of the Privy Council to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think it should be clear that I did not ask the President of the Privy Council to resume his seat. I asked him to be as brief as possible in concluding his remarks. I did not intend to suggest that the remarks of the President of the Privy Council were finished. I would not have wanted to do this because I do want to take into account that there have been five contributors from the left of the Chair on the question of privilege and it would be unfair to the President of the Privy Council if I were not to allow him to say what he has in mind. However, I would suggest to him that he should speak as briefly as possible, and I am asking him to do what I asked other members to do when they made their contributions to the question of privilege.

Mr. MacEachen: I appreciate your admonition and I will attempt to conclude my remarks as briefly as possible in a much shorter time than has been used by the opposition. I believe that the hon. member for Calgary Centre was the first person in the House this week to allude to a breach of the law. There is no question about that. The second person, in my study of *Hansard*, who has not used those

[Mr. Speaker.]

words but who raised the subject in the context was the Right Hon. Robert L. Stanfield, Leader of the Opposition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: I am following the mistake that was made the other day on his radio program.

Mr. Aiken: It is a forecast, not a mistake.

Mr. MacEachen: He said:

Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister who undertook on Monday, I believe, to investigate why the report of the Auditor General had not been tabled in the House within the time required by law.

I think that is a totally neutral statement. It is a fact that the report of the Auditor General has not been tabled in the House in the time required by the law. The hon. member for Calgary Centre said that the minister has breached the law. He is a fair hon. member and he should ask himself whether that is a fair charge against the minister that he breached the law by failing to table the report which had not been provided to him under the terms of the same law by the Auditor General.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harkness: I said a few minutes ago that he might well have had a good excuse.

Mr. MacEachen: The Prime Minister then referred to the same matter and referred obviously to the breaking of the law. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that the law has not been complied with. It is not the first time that the law has not been complied with in respect of the tabling of the Auditor General's report. This is the sixth year in succession that the Auditor General's report has not been tabled under the terms required by the law.

Some hon. Members: Why?

Mr. MacEachen: I ask you, Mr. Speaker—and I am coming to a conclusion—why has the matter become a question of privilege in its sixth year and not in its first, second, third, fourth or fifth years? Those are the facts, and at no other time has this House raised a question of privilege.

I make a final concluding point, Mr. Speaker, and it is this: it is suggested—and I will not go beyond that—that the Auditor General—let me put it in the most neutral way because I do not want to denigrate in any way the post of the Auditor General.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: It is not my intention and it is not the intention of the government to do that. We want to cooperate with his work in the greatest possible way. So let me say it has been suggested that the report has not been tabled, that the law has not been complied with because facilities have not been made available to the Auditor General. That is the contention. We on this side do not accept the validity of that contention.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!