

practice for some years in both instances. I am in sympathy with the point raised by the hon. member. I hope that it will be solved one day. But, as hon. members know, the Standing Orders are interpreted according to the practice of the House and there obviously has been a practice established in this respect. Perhaps for the moment the House might allow the parliamentary secretary to reply briefly on behalf of the minister, and then we will call orders of the day.

[Translation]

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond—

[English]

for his encouragement in helping me to get an appointment some day.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the hon. member that the minister will be concluding this week his discussions with the various premiers of all Canadian provinces and the various departments in each of those provinces—today he is in the Maritimes—and if any reports are to be released, it will be when the consultations are all concluded between governments.

As to the last part of the question put by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, without divulging the discussions which took place in Quebec City and which I attended, I wish to inform him that there are grounds to hope that those numerous representations, among which those from the community of Sherbrooke, to ensure that the provincial government recognizes the urgent nature of—

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond rises on a point of order.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the same point. I wish to draw Your Honour's attention to the fact that this precedent was started at the time the government was following the roster system and members of the House had no opportunity to ask questions even of acting ministers. Now that the Prime Minister has seen fit to do away with the roster system, I think he should at least establish acting ministers in this House when ministers are absent. I am not criticizing the necessity for ministers being away, but I say that the Prime Minister has an obligation to provide for members of the House acting ministers so that this nonsense can stop once and for all, because objections have been made to it since the first day it was started.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hope we will not get involved again in an interminable point of order and a series of questions of privilege. I would hope we might go on to the business of the day. However, the parliamentary secretary wishes to pursue the matter and I have no alternative but to listen to him.

Oral Questions

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I just wish to make one comment. It has been the practice of the House to have members on the other side address questions to members on this side who are not ministers, including chairmen of committees and parliamentary secretaries. I see no reason why the rules should be interpreted in such a restrictive fashion as the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond has suggested.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Nonsense!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before we hear the hon. member's point of order, I might point out that there seems to be a disposition on the part of hon. members, including the parliamentary secretary, to pursue the matter. I will listen to all hon. members who wish to make a contribution.

[Translation]

Mr. Pelletier (Sherbrooke): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

I think that the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond is not the only one who has been elected by the Canadian people; I too have been elected by the people and I am entitled to obtain answers.

[English]

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. It is not my intention to take away from the hon. member his right to represent his people, but I would suggest to him that he represent his people in the right way.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): If by chance a precedent is established in the House whereby the rules themselves can be violated, then I will turn up some very interesting precedents which involve the use of unparliamentary language in the House. A precedent has already been established on a question which was brought up last week which was ruled out of order owing to the use of unparliamentary language, but a few moments later someone on that side of the House used unparliamentary words. I say that if a precedent is going to be established, let us throw out the rule book and start all over again.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. If hon. members feel that this point has been resolved, we might now return to the business of the House.