

*Point of Order—Mr. McKenzie*

allowance recipients whose benefits were discontinued is not available.

3. (a) The number of persons whose spouse's allowance was discontinued immediately due to the death of the older spouse in the year 1978 is 2,090.

(b) The legislation concerning this item took effect on November 20, 1978. The first spouse's allowance to be discontinued after the six months extension will not occur until May, 1979. The number of spouse's allowances that were extended in 1978 for a period of six months is 26.

The number of benefits discontinued in December relate to situations in which the death of the older spouse occurred prior to November 20, 1978. The action to discontinue payment had to be taken in December.

[English]

**Mr. Pinard:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**Mr. Speaker:** The questions enumerated by the parliamentary secretary have been answered. Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

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## POINTS OF ORDER

MR. MCKENZIE—DELAY IN ANSWERING STARRED QUESTION 355

**Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I see the parliamentary secretary is not going to answer any starred questions today. On October 24, 1978, I placed starred question No. 355 on the order paper. It has been explained to me that starred questions are supposed to be answered within approximately two weeks, not five months. I placed a legitimate question on the order paper which reads as follows:

Did Canadian Aviation Electronics purchase hangars at the Winnipeg International Airport formerly owned by Air Canada and, if so (a) how many (b) at what cost in each case (c) did the Company pay the total agreed purchase price in each case (d) does the Company own the hangars fully, completely and outright (e) does the purchase agreement allow the Company to resell any of the hangars?

This is a legitimate question dealing with public buildings and I have a legitimate reason for asking it. The parliamentary secretary takes issue with this because we get up repeatedly and make remarks additional to the wording of our questions. It is no wonder we do that if we cannot get these questions answered properly, especially starred questions. I would ask him to look into starred question No. 355 and tell me tomorrow why he could not give me the information that I asked for last year.

● (1540)

MR. LAMBERT (EDMONTON WEST)—DELAY IN ANSWERING ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS

**Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West):** Mr. Speaker, some three weeks ago I placed some very straightforward questions on the order paper to be answered by the Minister of

[Miss Bégin.]

Transport (Mr. Lang). These matters are of notorious knowledge and they are within the competence of the department to answer within a week.

I cannot protest loudly enough on behalf of all members of this House regarding this situation. In most cases answers could be given in a week or ten days, yet we are kept waiting weeks and months. It is not the fault of the parliamentary secretary; he funnels the questions into the House. The fault lies with the ministers and their staff who do not take parliament seriously enough. It is parliament which asks for this information and it is not for the bureaucracy to say no. I say there must be a change. There has to be a change in attitude with regard to answering questions.

Many of us place questions on the order paper but infrequently. We do not do it for a joke, but bureaucrats backing ministers consider that it is a joke. They take all the time in the world to defuse or to try to obfuscate or cover up. Frankly, when I was in your position I would not accept that stand from departmental ministers who told me they could not answer questions. The Speaker of the House is there on behalf of members. I would suggest, sir, that a cluttered order paper is not something of which one should be proud.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, this applies to both questions. When there are 2,000-odd questions per session, it is rather difficult to guarantee a reply for each one within one or two weeks, as hon. members suggest. With 2,000 questions on the order paper, each department obviously has more than one question to deal with, and I have always made sure that no question was deliberately put aside and that all necessary action was taken to try and offer, as quickly as possible, the best and most complete answers as possible. All I ask hon. members is to realize that we must consider roughly 2,000 questions per session. Several of them refer to 40-odd departments or agencies, and it is impossible to reply consistently within one or two weeks, as hon. members request.

[English]

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** Mr. Speaker, may I say to the parliamentary secretary that there are persons whose sole employment is parliamentary returns. They are either incompetent or the most underemployed people in certain departments. I will agree with the parliamentary secretary that there are some questions which are complicated and of the multi-agency type. But those questions which are straightforward within the department and within reasonable, competent knowledge should not be taking a week or ten days to be answered.