

half months. The parliamentary secretary will note that questions No. 1,907 and No. 1,908 have sat on the Order Paper since January 12. Question no. 1,907 deals with the government's failure to promote the Telidon system at INTELCOM '80 in Los Angeles, and I asked why that was not done. I asked other related questions dealing with the whole issue of the government's promotion of that system. As the parliamentary secretary knows, I am this side's spokesman on communications and I think this is an issue which is germane to consideration of communication issues, and is one which could have been answered in that period of time.

Madam Speaker, the other question which I bring to your attention is No. 1,908 dealing with the CBC, and whether it was possible for independents to borrow CBC documentaries. Again, that is a very simple question which could have been answered over the course of two and a half months.

● (2130)

I think the delays here raise very serious questions about the utility of putting questions on the Order Paper, because if questions which are as simple as this stay on the Order Paper for two and a half or three months that renders the Order Paper useless as a means of obtaining information.

Members of Parliament put questions on the Order Paper because (a) they are of a technical nature and they cannot be asked in the oral question period, and (b) because they believe that a public response should be given. The vehicle of the question on the Order Paper enables us to do that. But what we find is that questions are put on the Order Paper, sit there indefinitely with no answer forthcoming, and that renders this vehicle absolutely useless. There are over 200 questions on the Order Paper ahead of the one I have mentioned, the one I put there on December 9. I have two questions among those two hundred which have sat on the Order Paper unanswered. It seems to me the system we have been following is one which has been very unsatisfactory for all sides of the House, because hon. members on all sides have questions on the Order Paper which remain unanswered.

I think it is incumbent upon the parliamentary secretary to give an answer to the members of the House as to what action he will take to ensure that simple questions which are placed on the Order Paper receive responses within a reasonable period of time. Perhaps, if it is not possible for him to do that, it would be appropriate for the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization to look at the whole procedure being followed here to see whether there are other mechanisms which can be followed to enable Members of Parliament to seek and obtain this sort of information from the government in a timely manner.

Mr. Collenette: Madam Speaker, I am in agreement with one part of the comment made by the hon. member opposite, and that is that this whole practice of questions on the Order Paper should be looked at by the Standing Committee on Organization and Procedure. Last fall I made some public comments on the practice of one member having many questions on the Order Paper which are very expensive to answer.

Points of Order

It engendered some public debate between the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt), myself and other hon. members. I certainly would take that point, and I commend the hon. member for bringing it forward this evening. Perhaps we should be looking at this particular aspect of our proceedings.

The hon. member talked about the delay in answering questions. I have repeated, on a number of occasions, that we have answered almost 80 per cent of the questions on the Order Paper. I would like to raise it to a 100 per cent, but the session is not yet over. Take for example, question No. 1,907 of the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) concerning Telidon. In part three of that question the hon. member says:

Has the government any estimates of promotional budgets for competitive systems produced in other countries and, if so, what are such estimates?

That is a tall order to fill; to get that kind of information in two months, three months, or even six months. We have to find out who are our competitors. It is very difficult, in some respects, to find out who the competitors are because not every country is forthcoming with this information.

If my reply is somewhat lengthy, I am only trying to accommodate, I am sure, the very sincere questions of the hon. member opposite.

Mr. Stevens: Madam Speaker, I would ask the parliamentary secretary to perhaps give the House an explanation as to why I have not received to this date—although it is over four months since I asked for it—an answer to question No. 1,774. This question deals with the estimated expenditures of de Havilland Aircraft of Canada for (a) advertising, (b) free or subsidized publication, and (c) other information conveyed to the public. I raise this particularly because, as we know, this is one of those unfortunate one dollar items that were included in the supplementary estimates and eventually passed in the bill that went through the House last night. I think it is unforgivable that the government, four months after the request, has not seen fit to give the House an explanation as to what, in fact, has been spent by that corporation in connection with the items I set out in my question.

Mr. Collenette: Madam Speaker, I am glad we are having this exhaustive interrogation about this item because it gives me an opportunity to explain some of the limitations I have in bringing these answers to the House.

The particular question raised by the hon. member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens), question No. 1,774, dealing with de Havilland Aircraft of Canada, deals with a company which I believe is a Crown corporation or the greatest shareholder is the Government of Canada. But one must realize that de Havilland Aircraft must operate within the marketplace, must keep certain information to itself if it is to compete with other companies. As a result, in respect of questions of this nature, when we are talking about the business practices of Crown corporations, or any company in which the federal government has a large interest, we have to respect—and I am sure the hon. members opposite would respect, given their support and belief in the principle of free enterprise—that there is only so