

Questions

has been put forward, and that there has been no suggestion that it was an improper question, I should like to follow up what the Prime Minister has said by pointing out that this is not something that affects procedure or accounting or anything of that kind which reasonably might wait until the representatives of the railway are before the committee. This asks for specific information which undoubtedly from the records of the company could be given at the request of the government, which after all is in a position to obtain that information. And I would point out that it is in the nature of information that would be useful to us now for the purpose of such discussion as might follow in the house in relation to this subject. I would suggest that this stand, if only for the purpose of giving consideration to the desirability of drawing some distinction between questions of this nature, which ask for information easily obtainable, and questions in regard to details which will be embraced in subsequent accounts which perhaps might be difficult to obtain separately from those which would be put forward at the time the officials are present in the committee.

Mr. St. Laurent: I think we all realize that the railway officials are anxious to maintain good relations with the members of parliament. They come before parliament every year with their financial budget. They have given that explanation. They will know the manner in which their explanation has been received in the house. Perhaps if Your Honour has no objection to allowing the question to stand it might stand. They will know how their attitude has been received in the house, and we know that they are anxious to maintain good relations with parliament as well as with the public.

Mr. Brooks: I should like to ask the minister a supplementary question. Is it not true that the fuel board has all this information, and that that board is under a department of government?

Mr. Chevrier: Well—

Mr. Speaker: Before the minister answers this question may I say that I think the procedure which is now being followed is most irregular. We are dealing with written questions. There are further supplementary questions which may be asked later, but that will be done when the orders of the day are called. I should like to remind hon. members of citation 307 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, third edition, which reads as follows:

A minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for his refusal, and insistence on an answer is out of order, no debate being allowed.

If the minister wishes to have the question regarded as having been answered, although the answer may not be satisfactory to some hon. members, I will have to declare the question answered. If he wishes to have it stand, I will say "stand".

Mr. Chevrier: I feel I must maintain the original position which I took, namely that the question is answered.

Mr. Speaker: Answered.

ELECTION SPEECHES—CENSORSHIP

Mr. Goode:

1. Has the government any knowledge of an order to submit texts of speeches, before delivery, to the police, during the 1953 general election?
2. If so, what were the circumstances?

He said: There has been an exchange of correspondence between the minister and me, and I am fully advised of the position. I thank the minister for his co-operation, and I ask that this question be dropped.

Mr. Speaker: Dropped.

THE NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. Johnston (Bow River):

1. What amount of interest has been paid on the national debt up to date?
2. What has been the cost of reservicing the debt up to date?
3. What amount of interest has been paid, during each of the last ten years?
4. What has been the cost of reservicing the debt for each of the last ten years?

Mr. Benidickson:

1. Fiscal years 1868 to 1953 — \$8,045,608,184.29.
2. Fiscal years 1868 to 1953—servicing of public debt, cost of issuing new loans and annual amortization of bond discounts and commissions—\$329,219,003.01.
3. Fiscal year ended March 31: 1944, \$242,681,180.44; 1945, \$318,994,820.53; 1946, \$409,134,501.56; 1947, \$464,394,876.26; 1948, \$455,455,203.64; 1949, \$465,137,957.94; 1950, \$439,816,334.54; 1951, \$425,217,500.07; 1952, \$519,933,150.54(*); 1953, \$451,339,521.22.

(*) Includes \$87,510,008.24 required to place interest on public debt on an accrual basis.

4. Servicing of public debt, cost of issuing new loans and annual amortization of bond discounts and commissions on loans:

Fiscal year ended March 31: 1944, \$19,457,-838.66; 1945, \$20,851,590.99; 1946, \$28,481,141.53; 1947, \$12,816,939.82; 1948, \$11,269,583.39; 1949, \$10,076,063.66; 1950, \$11,023,388.92; 1951, \$13,802,798.95; 1952, \$11,101,658.85; 1953, \$13,-579,715.87.

Balance at March 31, 1953, of discount and commissions on loans remaining to be amortized over term of loans—\$60,659,578.84.