

Routine Proceedings

I find that to be very disrespectful. I want to hear from my colleague and friend who is assuming the responsibilities of parliamentary secretary today as to what he intends to do about this.

We have not raised a point of privilege. I was clear to point out it was a point of order. I gave notice last Thursday morning hoping that the government could give us a full and comprehensive response as to why.

I guess we are being forced to raise this as a point of privilege but we seek the guidance of the Chair about this frightful and unbecoming behaviour and conduct of ministers opposite.

We on this side of the House all know, as I am sure Canadians from coast to coast know, that they have lost the will to govern but surely they should assume the responsibilities and provide the necessary information in accordance with the rules which we are all bound to follow.

Mr. McCreath: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond briefly to my hon. friend.

He did bring this point up last week as he said. One thing that is clear is that the rules say that questions are supposed to be answered in 45 days. It would be fair to say that is certainly a fact that is well-known by all ministers of this government. It is certainly the intent of our House leader and I think of our cabinet to attempt to see that all questions are answered.

What my colleagues may sometimes lose sight of is that some of these questions can be very complex and take a great deal of time to respond to. I refer particularly to questions that some might consider fishing expeditions. They start off with phrases such as: Since 1984 have any departments or agencies, et cetera.

Such a question requires consultation with 85 different departments and agencies of the government. It is a very complicated process. It can also be a very expensive process for the taxpayers, because when we set public servants at 85 different agencies to work trying to track down information which my hon. friends opposite feel they cannot do their jobs without and which they are perfectly entitled to, then the time will be taken and the cost will be borne by the taxpayer.

I would hope this is indeed essential information. However I would remind my hon. friend and the House that under a motion of this House on April 19, as a result

of the matter being raised not only by my hon. friend the opposition House leader but by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, this whole matter has been referred to the House management committee. I think it only appropriate that committee be given an opportunity to carry out the request this House and the Speaker have made that it look into this matter. It might appropriately look at the whole matter of Questions on the Order Paper to see that it does always serve a useful public function.

My hon. friend is absolutely right. The rules are clear. Questions are to be answered in 45 days. I will again bring the matter to the attention of the ministries to see if they cannot do their best to see that it is complied with.

Meanwhile I would suggest that this matter be left where the House has already referred it, the House management committee.

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary who has attempted to provide an answer to this inexcusable behaviour of ministers of the Crown.

I do not wish it to be left or omitted from the record that the purpose in changing the Standing Orders to limit each member of Parliament to a finite number of questions was for the very purposes he referred to in his remarks.

• (1520)

Prior to amending the Standing Orders members were allowed to have an unlimited number of questions which they could put to ministers of the Crown in order that they seek information. We have changed that and reduced that number to four. Therefore the number of questions each member can put is restricted to a finite number.

As the hon. member knows despite his verbal gymnastics today, although they may be appreciated by some of the viewing audience who may be watching the hon. member, the reality is that many of these questions are direct, succinct and to the point. I do not find it to be reasonable that members have to wait in excess of 300 days.

My colleague has made reference to the House management committee. That was a particular issue involving the Minister of Finance and certain documents and obligations with regard to that minister. The text of that