

Questions

requested be produced. Should this work be undertaken, the management feel that they would be faced with requests for similar information in respect of every other coal-consuming point in the system. The railways point out that this compilation would place a heavy burden upon the staff, and that it could not be done without extra expense being incurred. I hope the hon. member will appreciate the information that the railways have passed on to me, and that under the circumstances he will see fit to drop the question.

Mr. Brooks: The railways have passed on no information to the member, and I would like to have that information. I would be very pleased to discuss the matter further with the minister, but I do not feel like having the question dropped at the present time.

Mr. Chevrier: I am not in a position to answer the question. I can only reiterate the statement I have made, which has been passed on to me, namely, that the answering of the question would entail considerable expense and inconvenience and the collection of a great deal of information.

Mr. Brooks: Mr. Speaker, the argument that this information may be asked by many points across Canada does not hold water. It is asked for a particular reason in New Brunswick and Quebec, and I believe only those points are concerned. The people there are anxious to have the information and I, too, wish to have the question answered.

Mr. Chevrier: I am afraid I cannot give any other answer.

Mr. Speaker: Question number two, answered.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Stands?

Mr. Chevrier: The question cannot stand as it is. I am not able to give any further information than I have given. The house well knows that the practice of the Canadian National Railways, one that has been accepted in the house for years, is that if information of this nature is required it may be asked at a sitting of the committee on railways and shipping. That has been the practice for years. The hon. member is a member of that committee, and he can seek from the president of the Canadian National Railways, or from other officers who are there, information other than that which I may not be able to give. But if the question remains on the order paper I shall not be able to answer it, any more than I am at the present time.

[Mr. Chevrier.]

Mr. Brooks: I must object to having it answered in that way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member has put a question on the order paper. The minister could have answered either verbally, as he did, or in writing. He did answer it verbally, and if he says that is the only way that he can answer it now, the question cannot stand. It must be declared as having been answered. That is the position that one must take.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, I submit that this is a case for you to decide as to whether the procedure of the house is being complied with. A question has been asked. There is no suggestion that it is an improper question. The minister has stated that it cannot be answered, and then almost immediately afterwards has stated that it can be answered at another time. If it can be answered at another time, then it can be answered now, unless there is some reason, which has not been presented, why it should not now be answered.

Mr. St. Laurent: Mr. Speaker, the reason why it cannot be answered now is quite apparent. The Canadian National Railways is not a department of government. Hon. members are entitled to ask the government for the information it has at its disposal. I do not know whether the house can make an order that would be effective on the Canadian National Railways that they supply that information at this time. There has never been any attempt to reach a definite rule about that; but the practice has been that when hon. members want that kind of information, which is not a part of the government records, they ask for it when the officials of the railway company appear before the committee.

If it is felt that any company which is recognized as a crown corporation should be compelled to answer any question about its affairs that is raised in the house, perhaps that could be dealt with by the committee which has been set up to assist Your Honour in drafting rules; but the present rule is that the questions that are put have to be answered from the information that is in the possession of the government, and we have not got that.

Now, should there be an order that the records of the railway be kept in another fashion or tabulated in another fashion, that is something that can be considered; but in view of the statement that has been made that we have not got the information, the minister who reports to parliament in connection with transport has set out everything that appears on the records of the government.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, since I raised the point as to the way in which this question