

voluminous that they were each about one and one half inches thick. The compilation of the answers took a considerable amount of time, and all of those questions were placed by members of the official opposition.

The hon. member said that the practice of answering starred questions in the House has fallen into disuse. That is not correct. Since the House returned from the recess, a couple of questions have been answered—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Smith:**—which were starred.

**Mr. Nielsen:** At least two!

**Mr. Smith:** Well, we only answer ones which are starred, to begin with.

With regard to the hon. member's comments as to what constitutes a reasonable period of time, of course, the previous government, the Clark government, was in office for over nine months. With regard to the question placed on the Order Paper, I believe No. 30, standing in the name of the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt), that question was not answered by the Tory government either, even though it was in office for a period of nine months.

**Mr. Nielsen:** This government has been in for two years.

**Mr. Smith:** Therefore, I suppose it is a rhetorical question to ask what is a reasonable period of time. It depends on the nature and complexity of the question asked.

**Madam Speaker:** Before the hon. member raises a question of privilege on this particular question, I will read a quotation from Beauchesne's fifth edition, Citation 363, whereby it is very clearly stated that in no way can the Chair oblige a minister to answer a question. That also applies, of course, to the questions on the Order Paper. Citation 363 states:

(1) A minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for his refusal, and insistence on an answer is out of order, with no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such a refusal. A member may put a question but has no right to insist upon an answer.

That is quite clear. Answers to questions are left to the initiative of ministers and the government, and the Chair can in no way help the hon. member to insist upon a reply.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Madam Speaker, let me make it quite clear. I was not, I repeat not, asking the Chair to insist on an answer to a question being given. I was not asking that at all; nor was I insisting that members have a right to have ministers reply. I was merely raising the point to focus attention on the abuse—

**Mr. Smith:** Abuse?

**Mr. Nielsen:**—which has been the long-standing practice in the House with respect to the answering of written questions which, I submit, are treated quite differently from oral questions.

### *Housing*

I simply flag the matter now. It may well be, Madam Speaker, that it will meet with your pleasure if I can frame a motion in such a way that the matter could be examined by one of the standing committees. Because if we are not going to receive answers to these questions, why should we burden the taxpayer with the expense of printing a huge Order Paper comprising several hundred pages every Monday when we could at least save this cost? All the government has to do is to come clean and say that it will not answer questions which tend to be embarrassing to it or to any members of the cabinet, if that is to be the government's policy.

**Madam Speaker:** Just in case the hon. member does pursue what he announced in his statement, that is to say, that he might raise a question of privilege concerning this matter, I just warn the hon. member this may not be the subject of a question of privilege.

Shall the remaining questions stand?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### NATIONAL HOUSING ACT CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION ACT

#### MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed from Monday, February 22, 1982, consideration of the motion of Mr. Cosgrove that Bill C-89, to amend the National Housing Act and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works.

**Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, last evening I put forward what I considered to be a fundamental proposal to the minister that treatment be given to people who want to own homes or those who rent which is equal in benefit to what I think the farmers will get under a previous bill. I say, by way of background to what I said last night, that what we are really discussing is interest rates. It is my view, I believe I can substantiate on a quantitative basis, that the biggest cost-push inflation today is the long-term interest rate. This primarily applies to housing, for probably several hundred million dollars are out at any given time. Actually, it amounts to billions. I would like to repeat what I said yesterday so that it is absolutely clear to the whole House and, hopefully, to the country, namely, that there is a way out of this problem.

We should put ourselves into the shoes of the Governor of the Bank of Canada. For a year he has been pleading with the federal government to do something on the fiscal side on