

Privilege—Mr. Diefenbaker

member should put his question on the order paper of the House. I suggest that this is part of our procedure.

But I cannot go along with the assertion that we are putting too many questions on the order paper since indeed we receive a great many requests from Canadian taxpayers who want to put such or such question on the order paper of the House because they have not received from department officials answers to questions they have asked.

For instance, when one wants to know the price paid by the government for leasing offices in a given building in a Canadian city, I think we pay public servants to give that answer and to avoid wasting time in seeking the answers or information requested.

Mr. Speaker, as the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out a while ago, answering questions that should not even be put is also a waste of money, because hon. members could find the answers themselves in the reports of the various departments. He said it was a waste of time and money. If we want to talk about economizing, we should think very seriously about the large number of hours civil servants spend writing documents that fill our letter boxes with insignificant and useless literature. As for useful information, we are quite willing to get it and read it but every single day we get a huge quantity of useless papers that represent a waste of time, paper and money. We should also have a look at that, to see that there is no abuse in that field, and that people are not being paid for nothing, for the mere pleasure of writing things that are of very little interest.

Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of continuing to use that formula, that means of getting from the government the information we need when we want to answer the taxpayers' questions. That is why I am opposed to the government having the authority of deciding which questions should be put or rejected, because even the government members ask a lot of questions. I find that quite normal. Nobody is shocked because members of the government side can now ask questions during the question period, because they are considered private members like the rest of the House. And I am not shocked because their questions appear on the order paper. I would not want anybody to be shocked by the number of their questions appearing on the order paper, but I do wish that ministers would do their utmost to give an intelligent answer, so as to satisfy the member who asked the question. As long as democracy and the respect of members' responsibilities remain our chosen way of life, government will have to accept that questions continue to appear on the order paper, and those questions will have to be answered. The question is important, but so is the answer.

Such, Mr. Speaker, is the view of the hon. member for Bellechasse and of the members of the Social Credit Party of Canada. If ever this question is brought before the Committee on Procedure and Organization and members of the committee, after careful consideration of the situation, find there have

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

been abuses and that the standing orders should be amended so as to be more relevant and efficient, then I am willing to have the orders changed with a view to making them more democratic and allowing quicker answers to members' questions. This, I believe, would lead to a decrease in the number of questions, because the answers given would eliminate other questions. That is the view that I wanted to express, Mr. Speaker, on the question of privilege put by the right hon. member for Prince Albert.

● (1622)

[English]

Mr. Roger Young (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I simply want to point out that, if my ears did not deceive me, the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates) perpetuated something of an incorrect or misleading impression. Not all 1,532 questions on the order paper remain unanswered. I thought the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) pointed out quite explicitly that somewhere over 900, or over 60 per cent of those questions, have been dealt with already.

Since the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North has intervened this afternoon, I would just like to point out to him and to the House that I did receive a question from him this morning demanding a rather immediate answer. That question asked me, as a "supporter" of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, whether I might kindly remit as soon as possible some \$25 or more. I just want to assure that hon. member that this question in particular will remain outstanding and unanswered.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I rise on just a brief point. I am happy that the parliamentary secretary has indicated the matter of numerical numbers. The numbers game is very easy to play. The right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) left the House with the impression that there were 1,532 questions unanswered. That is totally false. As the House Leader explained, some 900, or 60 per cent of those questions, have been answered to date.

In answer to the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker), who tried to imply that I had a number of questions on the order paper, let me say that I have one question more than he has, and that is one question, and he has none. We do not abuse this. There are fewer than 500 questions on the order paper at this time, and there are 264 members in this House. If we all asked two questions, that is not a great number.

I recognize, as do all members here, the freedom to ask questions. I do not reject the point that some of the questions are difficult to answer. There is one thing I should like to see done, and that is, attached to the answer should be the amount of money representing the cost of providing the answer. Maybe we should be talking in terms of saving money in respect of the questions to be asked. It is about time this House knew that some questions are very expensive to answer. Perhaps in changes to the rules, and maybe the House will agree to this some day, we should require that the cost involved in answer-