

Point of Order—Mr. Beatty

Surely, Mr. Speaker, it is not unreasonable to expect, and indeed we have every right to expect the government to inform us as to just exactly how productive, how effective that last vote of \$100 million was under the Federal Labour Intensive Program and, more particularly, how many jobs were created by it.

The parliamentary secretary can put my mind at rest very quickly by explaining to me and to the House why he cannot get an answer to this question. That phase of the government's make-work program is now over. We are going into the next phase which will mean, as I have indicated, another vote under the Federal Labour Intensive Program. We have a right to know, Mr. Speaker. We are voting public money. We have a right to know whether or not that public money is productive in terms of its intent, in terms of the purpose for which it is being voted. Surely, sir, that lies at the very root of supply in this House.

We are on the eve of a new budget and we are going to have to go through the whole process again. By addressing myself to the legitimate grievance of the hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo, I would hope that you, sir, and the House, can find some way to satisfy the House and its members who have grievances in this regard. As I say, we no longer have the right under our new rules in this House to withhold supply. If we did, here is a classic case where I, as an aggrieved member, would withhold the passage of estimates to provide more money under the Federal Labour Intensive Program until the government was able to satisfy me that the previous vote, the \$100 million spent last winter, was effective in producing jobs.

The parliamentary secretary can put this matter to rest by telling me and the House that he is unable to obtain this information from the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) and from the various government departments. I suspect that is the dilemma in which he finds himself. If that is the case, then I have a question of privilege, and I will pursue that question of privilege with a substantive motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the remarks made by the first speaker, I believe he raised two points: the question of good faith and the question of the taxpayers. On the question of good faith, his remarks were directed either at me in my capacity as parliamentary secretary or the government generally. He knows quite well, or should know, that good faith is always presumed, and it is up to the person alleging that there was bad faith to substantiate it. The hon. member will understand that. He is smiling like his leader who, if he had passed his law exams, would be able to understand the principle I just mentioned but he is in a very bad position to be smiling on that principle when this government in the past two sessions answered over 90 per cent of the questions that were put on the order paper. I realize the hon. member is in an unfortunate situation in not being able to give

[Mr. McGrath.]

more substantiation or weight to his argument, when you consider that there are hundreds of questions put on the order paper every session, that my predecessor answered more than 90 per cent of them and that I answered 88 per cent or 89 per cent of those questions. That takes care of the argument of good faith raised by the first speaker.

With respect to his concern for the taxpayer, I draw his attention to his own questions. Very often his questions require research in several departments, and they are costing the taxpayers a fortune in time and research so we can give him a full answer or an answer that makes sense. And even if sometimes we are unable because of the end of a session to answer a question he asked, that does not mean that we did not do any research to try to answer it. In that sense, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member were more concerned with the good of the taxpayers, he would be more careful with the kind of questions he asks and he would try to ask questions perhaps as intelligent as the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has the habit of asking.

● (1622)

Mr. Speaker, there is also the intervention made by a second hon. member who spoke before the hon. member for St. John's East. He wanted to know whether there were any guidelines to be followed by those who do the research to provide answers to the questions on the order paper. The instructions given to the employees of all departments and agencies when they consider these questions are as follows: they must try to find as much information as possible to provide the best and the most complete answers possible as soon as possible. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, we continuously take steps to encourage these employees to provide us with full answers as soon as possible. In support of their excellent work, I must say that they have behaved very well and that they have always made valid efforts to provide this type of answer to the opposition as soon as possible. The results of the last few sessions stand as evidence of this fact.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as concerns question No. 232 asked by the hon. member for St. John's East, I shall take note of his representations, but I would still like to draw to his attention a mistake that he made in his comments. Since I have great respect for the hon. member, I am certain that it must have been an involuntary mistake when he said that we failed to reply to 20 per cent of the questions asked during the last session. He probably wanted to say that we did not reply to approximately 10 per cent of the questions asked during the last session, and I am convinced that he made this mistake involuntarily. As far as we are concerned, we shall try not to make any mistake when we reply to his question.

[*English*]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of matters I want to talk on with regard to this point of order in connection with answering questions, because of the diminishing right of private members to obtain informa-