

the subject matter is urgent, and there are also the written questions when there is no urgency. The only difference between the two types of questions, Madam Speaker, is that when they are asked orally, it is because, in principle, they concern an urgent matter. What occurs in practice is another matter but I do not want to debate the point. Second—

[English]

Mr. Cossitt: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, this has nothing to do with the question of privilege I raised. I do not know why we cannot stick to the subject, and not who has how many questions on the order paper and what percentage has been answered. The question I raised is basic. Is this government dishonest? Has it been instructing cabinet ministers to tamper with answers to questions on the order paper? We are getting sidetracked by the parliamentary secretary and by the President of the Privy Council about how great they are and that only as many questions can be answered. But there have been no answers to questions about Goldfarb for about four years, and that is getting a bit ridiculous. If they want to argue and debate, and that is what they are doing, then I should be allowed to do that too. But that is not the point; that is irrelevant. I know from the sources that this document came that it is accurate. If they deny it, then they have destroyed it this afternoon since I raised the matter in this House. I have asked that it be added as an appendix to *Hansard* because I am quite willing to do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, please excuse the hon. member. As I was saying, there are two kinds of questions: oral questions and those that are put on the order paper. Furthermore, Beauchesne gives a whole series of criteria on the basis of which questions are acceptable or not; in the case of written questions these will be found on pages 129-131 and in that of oral questions, on pages 131-133. Were those criteria applied rigorously, the question periods would obviously be much shorter, and the order paper would be much less crowded.

Setting aside that remark, Madam Speaker, because I do not want to start a debate at this point, I should like to point out that Beauchesne goes on detailing the criteria that apply to questions on page 133, he edicts the principle that:

Ministers may decline to answer any question whatsoever.

Once again, at the beginning of my remarks, I took great pains to indicate that generally we make considerable effort to answer the questions, all of them, and as completely as possible in theory on the basis of parliamentary practice; and according to commentators on the Standing Orders of the House, we are not obliged in any way to answer a question, whether it be oral or written. This is very clear in citation 363 of Beauchesne on the matter, and I quote:

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.

Privilege—Mr. Cossitt

Madam Speaker, that cannot be expressed more clearly for the purposes of the question of privilege now before you.

If we were to follow to the letter our parliamentary procedure, the Standing Orders, the authors and the precedents, it is obvious that unless we wanted to we would not have to answer any question on the order paper or any question put during oral question period. Such a decision would not have to be justified on our part and indeed could not result in a debate.

So technically speaking the point I want to make, Madam Speaker, by referring you to page 133 of Beauchesne's fifth edition, is that the question of privilege should obviously be rejected if we do not have to answer, and that refusal on our part to provide answers, which is not the case here anyway but even if it were the case, cannot become the subject of a debate.

Once again—and I want to be quite clear, I do not want to be ambiguous—the member for Leeds makes a request for a document to be annexed to *Hansard*. On grounds of principle, at this time, I am opposed to such a move whatever the nature of the document. If he wants to show it to newsmen or to his friends, that is his problem. But as far as the House of Commons is concerned, we want the Standing Orders to be complied with. I have just referred to the relevant rules. You see how open we are on this side of the House, because we are not doing what the Standing Orders allow us to do, which is to refrain from answering. On the contrary, as indicated by the hon. parliamentary secretary, we do all we can to answer fully as many questions on the order paper as possible.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I would ask you to consider that there is absolutely no prima facie case of privilege, and that the remarks made by the hon. member for Leeds and by his House leader are absolutely not in compliance with the Standing Orders, which do not provide for a debate when there is no answer.

• (1530)

[English]

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Durham-Northumberland): On a question of privilege, Madam Speaker.

Mr. McKenzie: On the same question of privilege, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am afraid I cannot hear that many members on the question of privilege. It is already difficult for me to see where the question of privilege lies since most of the actions occurred outside the House. I will listen to one further intervention on the opposition side, and then I will make a statement.

Mr. Lawrence: Madam Speaker, the one request that is immediately before you this afternoon is that the document in question be appended to today's proceedings. To be perfectly frank, I am not sure whether that requires unanimous consent. I believe it may be within the discretion of the Chair whether