

I am quite prepared to withdraw one or two of these questions. I just do not understand why they have not been answered.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, two issues are involved, a matter of procedure and a question of fact. Concerning the question of procedure, I would like to draw your attention once again to the wording in the second part of Standing Order 39(1) which states:

—but in putting any such question—

—that is a question on the order paper—

—or in replying to the same no argument or opinion is to be offered, nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question the matter to which the same refers shall not be debated.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders allow hon. members to place questions which are not urgent on the order paper and it is forbidden to comment on them except as far as providing explanations required to understand them. We have witnessed in the House recently an obvious violation of Standing Order 39, which forbids us to make petty politics about non-urgent questions, since certain members who have complained that their questions have not yet been answered have taken this opportunity to try to score political points, suggest all sorts of inaccuracies and make insinuations which are eventually denied in most cases, two, three, four or five days later, and we never hear about the replies given to the questions about which someone had previously complained by rising on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, our Standing Orders provide for a written order paper, and not an oral one like that which we have been given today and in the last few weeks. As for the facts, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind hon. members about something which is quite simple and easy to understand. In the last few years, it has become the practice to ask about 2,000 questions during a session.

It is nearly impossible to provide complete answers to each of these 2,000 questions during one session. In practice, we can reply to about 40 per cent of questions placed on the order paper during one session, and during the summer recess, we succeed in replying to 45 to 50 per cent more questions, which means that on the average, 90 per cent of all questions are answered during the session. This is based on the record of the three previous sessions, and especially of the last two sessions when I was myself parliamentary secretary. In view of these circumstances, I say that it is unfair for opposition members, and especially members of the Progressive Conservative party, to suggest to the public—and certain reporters seem to rise to the bait—that we have things to hide on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, it is mere coincidence that yesterday I approved an answer to a question put by the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones), and which was supplied today. In a

Points of Order

press article that appeared yesterday, Charles Lynch stated that question would never be answered. The question itself was erroneous in asking the rationale behind the Government of Canada's invitation to the "President of France", Mr. Barre. Everybody knows Mr. Barre is the French Prime Minister. Not only did we not hesitate to supply an answer to the hon. member, even though certain quarters believed we would never do so, but we even had to correct the questions on occasions.

So our record speaks for itself. Over the last sessions, of 2,000 average questions on the order paper, 90 per cent were answered, and if the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) was more sensible and more serious in his questions, if instead of monopolizing two or three pages of the order paper, as he mentioned today, he limited himself to less stupid questions, and I see Mr. Speaker you are losing patience, which is normal after the number of interjections from the other side, but I know you will give me just the same an opportunity to conclude my point. If the hon. member were more sensible in the number and validity of his questions, his colleagues probably would not have to complain that we do not have the time to accumulate all the information needed to give them complete questions. The abuse is on the other side, because there are indeed irresponsible people there putting questions that are costing taxpayers a fortune, since we have to answer questions as they come in a proportion of 40 per cent during the course of a session.

If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, I would like in conclusion to call your attention to the practical fact that as of March 21, as of today, of the 1,331 questions that appeared on the order paper during this session, 42.2 per cent have already been answered. This is more than the average of earlier sessions, because the average is 2,000 questions per session and to date there have been 1,331.

Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. The interventions of opposition members truly represent an abuse of our Standing Order 39 and they are denied by the facts. I respectfully submit that Your Honour should put an end to this abusive practice of suggesting falsehoods while we on this side of the House are making every effort possible to do some research, obtain all necessary information and give opposition members the most complete answers possible as quickly as possible. In conclusion, it should be clear, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side of the House have nothing to hide and that we do all we can to provide complete answers as quickly as possible. It has been our policy in the last years and it still is, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, my name was mentioned a few moments ago. I made a statement the other day. I stand by my statement. At the time I was Speaker, there was an unlimited question period. The hon. member who just sat down should be made aware of what this House did at that time. Question period was unlimited. It ran