

the members of the Government, but for all Members of this Chamber.

The Order Paper is a mechanism that was intended to request information without using the time of the House and an opportunity for the House to provide the information. It works that way. In the last Parliament we were able to handle 90 per cent to 93 per cent of the questions within the allotted 45-day period to the satisfaction of the Members. But the remaining 7 per cent or 8 per cent are impossible to answer in some cases and impossible to answer within the 45 days in other cases. It is enormously expensive in human terms to create the information base thus depriving the population of this country of a good service that they need perhaps more than the information. Surely the nub of the issue is whether Parliament should decide that the answer is required or whether the Government should decide. This Government chooses to request the opportunity, in those borderline cases, for Parliament to decide rather than for the Government to simply decide.

• (1600)

Mr. Speaker: I might say to Hon. Members that I think I have the issue here. I will hear several more Hon. Members, but I would ask them to be brief and please do not be repetitious.

Mr. Jack Whittaker (Okanagan—Similkameen—Meritt): Mr. Speaker, I thought it would be of benefit for you to hear a view from one of the rookies in the House here in the far distant corner. When coming to this place, one looks at the method available for a newly elected person from the opposition benches to get information that cannot otherwise be obtained. Of course, we turn to the Standing Orders and one of the ways to get such information is under Standing Order 39(1), placing questions on the Order Paper. In fact, I did that in the case of question number 64 which is of interest to the area I represent. In addition, it is of interest to the area of Annapolis in Nova Scotia and to the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario. The question asks for a breakdown from the Government of the consumption of fruit products in veterans' hospitals, prisons under the authority of the federal Government and the armed forces bases, and at what locations these fruit products are purchased.

Point of Order—Mr. Althouse

In effect, the Government is asking you, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 39(6) to circumvent a back-bencher's procedure to obtain answers that I have no other way of obtaining through usual sources. If you in fact decide that my question is a proper question to fall under Standing Order 39(6), it will put my question into the draw for motions, and with almost 500 motions, the chances of that question getting drawn is not that great. By the time it is debated over a five-hour period, if it is selected as a votable motion, the chances of obtaining that answer for my constituents and for the people of the fruit industry are very negligible. I would submit that the question I have submitted is of some great importance to those people who are constantly looking for places to sell fruit and for employment opportunities in areas with high unemployment.

I wish to add my voice to those that you have heard in opposition to the Government's request.

Looking at Standing Order 36(1), I wonder if the question has to be a simple one, capable of being answered in brief. In reading through Standing Order 39(1) or the commentary under it, I find nothing that provides that the answer has to be a short answer or capable of being answered in brief. Does it have to be simple? How simple does it have to be? If it is a simple answer, we can often get the answer from the Parliamentary Library or from a member of our staff, but this is not always the case. In the case of my question, I cannot get the information from other sources. The source I have turned to is Parliament, and I would ask your consideration, Mr. Speaker, in accepting the arguments of those in opposition.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, some years ago, I, along with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader (Mr. Cooper), was a member of the McGrath committee, and it is from the McGrath committee that we got this particular procedure. As has been mentioned previously, there was a different type of written question in the past.

Older Members will recall Tom Cossitt of Leeds—Grenville who used that process very well. He put several hundred political questions on the Order Paper. He cluttered up the Order Paper with very political questions and the Committee decided that this was an opportunity for Members, particularly back-benchers, to vent their rage at the Government, but it was not a very