

Order for Return

[Translation]

QUESTION PASSED AS ORDER
FOR RETURNGROSS AND NET VALUE OF THE
NATIONAL DEBTQuestion No. 225—**Mr. Caouette:**

1. What is Canada's debt, gross and net?
2. What is the debt of Crown corporations, gross and net?
3. How much money do Canadians owe to banks and credit unions for personal loans?
4. What is the amount of the gross national product?
5. What is the total money supply in bank notes and coins in circulation?
6. What interest did the federal government pay during the last payment period on the national debt and on its bonds?
7. How many finance companies are there in Canada and what are the names of such companies in each province?

Return tabled.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Shall the remaining questions stand?

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday I raised a question of privilege because of the fact that questions standing in my name, numbers 5, 163 and 210 had not been answered. Since that time there have been two opportunities for the government to provide the answers to these questions.

In view of the fact that there are now 198 questions standing on the order paper, and the question standing fifth from the beginning of the list has not yet been answered, this indicates the government is not providing the kind of co-operation which the opposition would expect if we are to go along with the provisional rules that have been given to the house.

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, these repeated allegations have been causing the government a great deal of concern. The number of questions that used to be asked in an entire session was about 600. So far, in less than two months of this session we already have had 998 questions on the order paper. I am not complaining about that; but I do want to draw the attention of the house to a problem that is pressing because of the form in which

[Mr. Nicholson.]

questions are asked and the resultant difficulty in answering them. I can give no better example than question No. 5 which reads:

What is the total amount of expenditure of the federal government made as of this date, or undertaken, or planned directly or indirectly, in connection with Expo '67?

I know that the answer to the expenditures was prepared and sent forward some weeks ago by the minister responsible for Expo, but the hon. member's question necessitates the checking of every department and agency of government to find out what expenditures were planned indirectly in connection with Expo '67.

The question is not in a form that is capable of getting a reasonably prompt answer, and I respectfully suggest—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Cumberland (Mr. Coates) has raised this matter for a second time as a question of privilege. I believe he will probably agree with the Chair if I say this is not truly a question of privilege.

If the hon. member would refer to citation 181 (3) of Beauchesne's fourth edition he will read:

A minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for his refusal, and insistence on an answer is out of order, no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such refusal.

The hon. member is referring to three specific questions which he says have not been answered. My suggestion to him is that normally this type of objection would be raised as a grievance, when grievances are taken, or during the question period, by asking a minister why a specific question has not been answered, or whether a specific question will be answered.

Mr. Coates: On that point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the ruling you are now making is with regard to oral questions, and not with regard to written questions.

Mr. Speaker: The citation I have been quoting for the benefit of the hon. member refers not only to oral questions but applies equally to written questions.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I feel I must rise on a question of privilege as a result of the point of order raised. The reason that there has been an increase in the number of written questions is because there have been rulings that these questions should