

I remember the answers to other questions, and remember the famous exchange which arose from the statement the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) made in western Canada, the statement that ferocity toward love might be inspired by the eating of beef. Some bright soul in the bureaucracy—I would not give the Minister of Agriculture credit for it—was able to fish out an appropriate quotation from Shakespeare. That was part of a beautiful game. But I cannot see that the government's stonewalling tactics are any part of a beautiful game. I think they are an affront to us. If we ask a question the least bit penetrating, or with even a tincture of political punch—and I have not read them all because some are too long—they are not answered. However, I think the hon. member for Leeds has a complaint, because his questions have not been dealt with seriously by the government in the House of Commons.

● (1600)

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon):

That the lack of responsiveness of members of the ministry to questions placed on the order paper within a reasonable period—

For the purposes of this motion I will state nine months as being reasonable.

—constitutes a breach of the privileges of this House, and that this failure should be sent at once to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to determine whether there is a deliberate decision not to reply.

In support of my motion I merely make this comment. Up to question 871 of October 29, presented by the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse), that all falls within the nine-month period that I suggest is a reasonable period. There are pages and pages to support my motion that we should become an open parliament and should have freedom of information.

Mr. Brisco: Mr. Speaker, this is the third time in recent months that I have risen on the same point of order with reference to question No. 506 which was placed on the order paper on October 14. The last time I raised this question I received the personal assurance of the parliamentary secretary that he would look into this matter and that I would, indeed, receive a response. I have heard nothing from him since then. I very much resent the fact that I have not had a reply to that question which until now I had assumed was an innocent and innocuous one. I now gather that there is more beneath the surface than meets the eye in relation to the question that I posed. I again draw this most forcibly to the attention of the parliamentary secretary and you, sir.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I rise to add just a brief comment to the question of privilege raised a moment ago by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave). At approximately 2.30 this afternoon my office received a communication from a high-ranking member of the public service. I have since checked out, by telephone, this person's identity and the information left at my office. I find it, beyond any doubt in my mind, to be authentic.

Order Paper Questions

The information is that answers to questions Nos. 1196, 1197, 1198 and 1199 have been prepared for some considerable time, and that a stop order has been issued on the answers to these questions being placed before the House by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and by the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer).

I feel I have the right to outline these questions. They all concern the constituency of Matane. They ask for information as to how many cabinet ministers visited that constituency over a set period of time; why they went there; how much public money was spent while there; who accompanied them, and why those people accompanied them.

It also asks for information with regard to cheques issued to the hon. member for Matane (Mr. De Bané), on his behalf, and paid for by the Department of Supply and Services. It also asks for information about payments on behalf of the hon. member for Matane when he was parliamentary secretary to the minister of state for urban affairs and when he was parliamentary secretary to the secretary of state for external affairs, including trips made and paid for by the government, people who accompanied him, and the whole gamut which I previously mentioned with regard to cabinet ministers. This is a very serious situation. It becomes very serious when a member of this House asks questions in all sincerity, requesting information about expenses of members of the cabinet or others, where the expenses seem to be grossly out of line. This is something taxpayers have a right to know about. It becomes a very serious matter when the government stonewalls the answers.

In the case of these particular questions, I realize it can be said as it is often said and quoted from the rules with regard to questions—that there is no obligation or necessity for a minister to answer questions. However, as I have said before, there is a moral obligation on a minister to answer a question from a member of this House, and, through a member of this House, to the people of Canada as a whole. That moral obligation is not being fulfilled, for reasons I can only interpret as political. The person who contacted my office this afternoon advised that the answers to the specific questions which I have named would be so politically damaging to the government that they would never be answered. In fact, that person stated that the stop order said they must die on the order paper in this session of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cossitt: If that is so, and I believe it is so, parliament has seen this government sink to a new and dirty low. It is time the parliamentary secretary ceased to sit there and shake his head or rise to say that he will answer my questions, as he did a few weeks ago, when I become civil. That has nothing whatsoever to do with the matter. His personal opinion of me is no answer as to why he or the government should not be answering questions in this House. They are not being answered for obvious reasons.

The hon. member for Halifax-East Hants cited the general concept of what has gone unanswered on the part of a number