

Routine Proceedings

We have these Standing Orders. We have agreed to them and we are expected to follow them. Yet, I look at a whole list of questions that have been there, not for 45 days, not 50, not 60, but over 70 days.

I know it is difficult, but government ministries do have people working for them. Their job is to respond to these and to follow the Standing Orders.

Mr. Milliken: 120 days.

Mr. Riis: My friend from Kingston and the Islands says even as many as 120 days. I seek some guidance from you, Mr. Speaker. We either have Standing Orders and we follow them or we do not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Maybe we can get an explanation from the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

• (1300)

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we do try to make every possible effort to answer those questions within 45 days. We often run into difficulties. One serious problem which we have faced has been the fact that some of the questions are addressed to all departments and it takes a great deal of time to co-ordinate that information.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you take under advisement Standing Order 39 (5) (b):

If such a question remains unanswered at the expiration of the said period of forty-five days, the member who put the question may rise in the House under "*Questions on Order Paper*" and give notice that he or she intends to transfer the question and raise the subject-matter thereof on the adjournment of the House.

In other words, they can transfer it for debate. I would recommend in cases where we are not able to answer within 45 days that the House follow that procedure. That would be an easy way for all of us to make sure these questions are answered.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I say to my hon. friend that in some cases that might be an appropriate way out. However, I have looked at some of these questions that are in excess of 70 days. They are not tricky.

Here is one that simply asks: "Has the government assumed any costs relating to the furnishing of 24 Sussex Drive?" This is not a tricky question. You simply go to Public Works or the appropriate department and ask. This has been sitting on the Order Paper for months and months.

The intent is not to embarrass the Prime Minister or the government, but simply to find out whether renovations have been made and, if so, what did it cost the government. This is not a complicated question. I cannot accept fully the explanation put forward by my hon. friend.

These are our Standing Orders. These are the rules and regulations that govern our behaviour. Every day the government consistently abandons the Standing Orders, ignores them. We either follow our Standing Orders or, as the government is doing, select which Standing Orders we want to follow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It might be wise if the House leaders would discuss this further behind the curtains or among themselves at their management committee meetings or come into the Chamber and talk to the Speaker at his leisure.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief.

I was in the Chamber earlier this day when the member rose and presented two petitions to the House. In the presentation of the second petition, I would like to point out to the House, he did indeed break Standing Order 36(7) and very clearly so. If he wants the rules enforced, I would suggest he start with his own behaviour.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I do not think we should debate this any further. I understood that he was just about ready to finish as far as his particular petition was concerned. I do not think we should consider that any more.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a very short point of order.

My hon. friend, the government Whip, has pointed out that I have not followed Standing Order 36(7). I might say that what I did was read my petition.

If the government Whip is saying that I am not allowed to read the words of my petitioners then this is a muzzling of democracy and I will not stand for it. If my petitioners who have collected the petition want me to present it, I am going to present it whether the government Whip wants me to or not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I just want to bring to the attention of the hon. member for Kamloops that there is only 15 minutes allowed for the presentation of petitions. There were a lot of colleagues in his own party who wanted to get on too. That is why in future, when