

Orders for Returns

of knowing that, but the parliamentary secretary might be allowed to proceed at this point.

[*Editor's note: Following order paper questions.*]

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I dislike having to rise again concerning questions that are not being answered, but it seems obvious there is a concerted effort not to answer questions that may prove embarrassing to the government. One of the reasons so many questions are being asked during the oral question period is the fact that it is almost impossible to get answers to order paper questions when the government finds it advantageous to conceal.

I refer to question No. 52, a very simple question. It asks what is the amount, since July, 1971, by province, that has been expended by all departments of government in grants or other assistance to corporations, partnerships, and so on. There can be no excuse for not answering that question which has been on the order paper now for two and a half months.

I would also refer to questions Nos. 1,004 and 1,080 having to do with my own province. They concern the removal of a government department from the London building to another building after the expenditure of more than \$1 million to put the London building in shape. The first of these questions has been on the order paper since February 16. It is very simple. It asks whether the federal income tax office in Saskatoon is being moved. There is just no excuse whatever for the egregious contempt being shown to parliament by the degree to which this government refuses to answer very simple questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Unless we are able to secure some assurance from the government that it is either negligent in securing information available to it or that it has some other reason, we can only conclude that the idea behind not answering is concealment of facts that the government realizes would not be advantageous to it to reveal.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order raised by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), I should like to draw his attention to the fact that the question about which he has complained, No. 52, requires a very extensive search involving many departments of the government. It would seem to me that merely looking at the question would be ample indication to any hon. member that to answer it accurately and deal with its many aspects would require more than a day or two.

Mr. Diefenbaker: But two and a half months?

Mr. MacEachen: I assure the right hon. gentleman that, while we appreciate his regular interventions on these occasions condemning the government, we are making a very serious effort to answer questions as rapidly as possible.

There are on the order paper at present more questions than have ever appeared on any order paper, and there have been more answers given up to the present time during this session than at the same point in any other previous session of the House of Commons, including that

[Mr. Speaker.]

period when the right hon. gentleman was Prime Minister of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McEachen: The hon. gentleman ought to refresh his memory about recent history. He ought to compare the performance of the present time because it is a very good performance. I should like to see it better, but it is reasonably good.

• (1430)

I would draw to the attention of Your Honour and hon. members that it is possible to abuse the practice of placing questions on the order paper. I do not accuse my right hon. friend of that. However, I wish to draw to the attention of the House the fact that over the weekend one hon. member placed on the order paper 98 questions. Surely that is not in accordance with the intent or purpose of questions on the order paper. If hon. members want to abuse the practice by loading up the order paper with a multitude of questions, we will be confronted with legitimate grievances as presented by the right hon. gentleman. I suggest, if we are to use the order paper properly, that the number of questions should be reduced, and we will do our level best to get answers for hon. members.

I will make another effort to see that the request of the right hon. gentleman is met as quickly as possible.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, having regard to the interest the hon. gentleman is taking in the period during which I was Prime Minister regarding questions, the smokescreen he has raised pleases himself and those surrounding him. The total number of questions I have on the order paper is nine. How transparently deceptive his remarks are. He is a good debater and he makes the best of a bad case. Question 1,004 reads as follows:

1. Is the federal Income Tax Office in Saskatoon being moved from the federally-owned London building to the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce building?

2. What has been the cost of operating the London building during each of the past five years?

3. Under the lease of the said bank building (a) what is the annual rental and for how long (b) is there a further rental period provided at the option of the lessee?

That question has been on the order paper since February 16. The hon. gentleman's attempt to explain the unexplainable is answered by the fact that that question under no circumstances comes within the ambit of the imaginary hypothesis he has advanced.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I also rise on the point of order. I can only echo the remarks of the right hon. member for Prince Albert. I should like to refer to four specific questions. I admit it is often difficult to follow the smokescreens cast by the government House leader. I believe there are more questions on the order paper for the very good reason that there are so many things wrong that need inquiring into. The four questions I should like to refer to are as follows: Nos. 443 and 444, which require simple yes or no answers, have been on the order paper for a little over two months. Question No. 819 concerns the new income tax forms, the cost of advertising and the fee paid to that great outstanding tax expert, Mr. Davis. I do