

Points of Order

of time to answer. Questions Nos. 7 and 8 concern a letter marked confidential sent by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) to all Liberal members of parliament telling them how to explain to the public why he and other members of the cabinet were using government aircraft at public expense. I asked why that letter was not sent to other members of parliament as well.

In another question I asked how many members of the Canadian Transport Commission and their wives had passes on Air Canada. I would not think it would take two to three years to tell us how many there were and who they were.

In question No. 9 I asked about the fingerprinting of public servants. I asked why this practice was going on, how many people had been fingerprinted and so on. I would not think it would take between two and three years to answer that question.

In question No. 10 in regard to Goldfarb and Associates of the city of Toronto, pollsters for the government and the Liberal party, I asked how much business they had received from the government over a certain period of time. Surely it does not take a year to two to get this information.

Finally I mention question No. 5 concerning the Prime Minister's office. In this question I asked about the \$86,000 spent on purchases for his office. I asked for a breakdown of the items he purchased. It has been two and a half years since I asked that question. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is in the House as I raise this point of order. I challenge him to tell us why he will not let the Canadian people know upon what it was in the way of \$86,000 of public funds that he spent furnishing his office. If the Prime Minister cannot comply, has the parliamentary secretary got the intestinal fortitude to do it for him? Surely the Prime Minister, on the verge of an election, owes the Canadian people some kind of an explanation. He should not be hiding the truth on all these questions from the Canadian people in the hope they will not realize that we have the worst government in the history of this country.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the matter raised by the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt), the question has been answered. It has been answered repeatedly in general terms to the effect that information as to spending under my department, the Privy Council office, on furnishings in my office, and for that matter in my house, which come under the Department of Public Works, is available to the public. Expenditures are tabled and they are known. The hon. member has just quoted a figure. Officials of my department come before the parliamentary committee on estimates any time they are asked and they answer all and every question put to them. The hon. member is obviously trying to get the floor once again on this spurious point.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall).

Mr. Cossitt: A question of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Cossitt.]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds on a question of privilege.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I simply wish to say that the Prime Minister has completely misquoted what I said. I think it is my duty, under a question of privilege, to point out to him that question No. 5 has not been answered, regardless of what he says. I challenge him again—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Surely the hon. member is using a question of privilege simply to disagree. That is not within the ambit of a question of privilege.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I rise on this question of the failure on the part of the government to answer questions properly placed on the order paper. It would seem that courtesy at least would suggest that if the question is improper or causes too great an expenditure for the government in gathering information, a brief private conversation or a note sent across the floor of the House indicating the trouble the government is having might in many instances avoid complaints from members from time to time about failure to answer these questions.

Like other members, I too have questions that have been on the order paper for two or three sessions. Indeed, I have one that has been on the order paper for about five or six years. I hope it will be answered shortly.

My questions are relatively simple. They involve the financial relationship between Canadian National Railways and Cast steamships. I asked how much money was being earned. One cannot get this information from the corporate balance sheet of the Canadian National Railways, nor can we get it from Cast. I asked questions about MAGI, the Metropolitan Area Growth Investments group in Halifax, later known as Mainland Investments, now defunct. The question was put on the order paper three sessions ago. It asked for the names of the board of directors, a relatively simple thing. The question was put on the order paper so that much of the misinformation, rumour and indeed vilification with regard to that organization being spread around eastern Canada could be straightened out. It was put on to serve peace, order and good government. It has not been answered.

● (1530)

It is a disservice when the government does not indicate to the individual member why it will not answer a question. Of course, the government does not have to answer; I am aware of that. In my case I have questions Nos. 151, 169, 170, 171 and 173. I will not go beyond October of last year. Any one of those questions could be answered, not at a cost of \$3,000 or \$4,000 as is sometimes suggested, but with five or ten minutes of political or moral will to do so.

I ask the parliamentary secretary to take a particular look at that. If there is a reason why the government does not want to or is not in a position to answer, it should at least have the courtesy to send a note so that a member might rise in his place and ask for unanimous consent to withdraw the question.