

Business of the House

that he made the phone call to the judge after the appeal was under way, he has an obligation to explain his earlier comments which many people interpreted as meaning that his phone call took place prior to the commencement of the appeal. He inadvertently, or otherwise, misled the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby may, of course, have a very valid comment on the relationship between the two answers given by the minister or the quality of either, or both, but this does not technically constitute a point of order.

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I should like to rise on a point of order to seek clarification of the point of order raised by Your Honour yesterday. The hon. member for Bonavista-Trinity-Conception asked a question and Your Honour stated he could not receive an answer to the question because it had been previously asked. Then, on a later point of order, when Your Honour was asked further about the situation, Your Honour stated that the test is not whether or not the question had been raised previously but whether or not it had been answered previously.

Clearly, we on this side of the House, particularly on the backbenches, have very limited opportunity to ask questions. I should like to bring to Your Honour's attention the fact that in the past few days we have had repeated questions on the matter of the judicial difficulty in the city of Montreal relating to ministers, and there has been repeated repetition of all points. I shall deal in specifics. On March 3, as reported at page 11457 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby asked whether the Prime Minister did not think it appropriate to have a public inquiry, and so on. On March 4, as recorded at page 11484 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby asked whether the Prime Minister was prepared to appoint an independent commission, and so on.

Then on March 4, as recorded at page 11486 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby asked for a public inquiry. Also, as recorded on the same page, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby asked for a public inquiry and whether the public would have access to the written report. As recorded at page 11490 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands asked for a public inquiry. On March 8 the hon. member for Central Nova asked for a special inquiry. On March 9, as recorded at page 11613 of *Hansard*, the Leader of the Opposition made a request for publication of the report of the judge. Yesterday, as recorded at page 11660 of *Hansard*, the Leader of the Opposition asked whether or not there was interference. As recorded at page 11661, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby asked whether or not there was interference. All I say—

An hon. Member: We want some answers.

Mr. Abbott: The hon. member says they want some answers. Answers have been given. I suggest there is a grave inequity in respect of some members of this House who must sit here day after day listening to repetitive questions: the same questions are asked over and over again. Mr. Speaker, my point of order is that if the back-bench members on this side of the House are to be governed by such a rule, I would respectfully ask Your Honour to apply the same rule to the opposition.

[Mr. Broadbent.]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise that there have been repeated questions, but if the member feels there have been repeated questions with regard to the matter I wish to say to you, sir, and through you to him, that there has been repeated evasion in respect of an answer on the matter of a public inquiry. I hope the hon. member is not saying that the members of the opposition ought to sit quietly by and accept evasive and non-answers. Does he suggest that we should sit quietly by, retire, and leave a public matter like this hang the way it is, a matter which day by day is bringing disrepute to this government? I say "Shame" to the member who just raised the point of order.

In so far as the operation of the question period is concerned, aside from the question of the stonewalling which I think is apparent to everyone, the member has raised a point of order with regard to the way in which the Chair is handling this House. I want to say to you, sir, that if the question period is to be used for the answering of questions that can be raised by the member in another forum where may not be the same reticence to confess wrongdoing, then I think that would be an improper use of the question period. By tradition you, Mr. Speaker, have made a ruling in respect of the position of parliamentary secretaries because they are privy to certain information.

In regard to the operation of this House, the question period is a place in which to attempt to elicit information. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that you have been extremely generous, having regard to the conduct of some of your predecessors, in respect of questions by government members. It is my duty and part of my function as a member of the opposition to very carefully monitor the operation of the question period. I do not say this as a criticism of you, sir—quite the contrary; but I say that the hon. member is not making a valid point when he says that you have been unfair in terms of the question period, having regard to questioning by the opposition.

I have done some research in respect of the operation of the question period in the past. The fact of the matter is that to a greater extent government members are being recognized. I suggest to you, sir, with great respect—and great respect to my friends as well, because I can understand their frustration in having to sit behind a government like that—that you must exercise a great deal of care in that regard because of the position of the Chair having regard to the traditions over the years as to the use of the question period. If there has been what my friend calls repetition with regard to this matter, I want to say to him that if this government would come clean, if this Prime Minister would answer the questions we have asked, if the Minister of Public Works would answer the questions we have asked, and if they would give the country the public inquiry for which we have asked from the first day, we would ask no more questions in this regard.

● (1520)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in just a word or two may I say to the hon. member for Mississauga that the most effective way to avoid repetition of questions is for the government to answer the questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!