

Privilege—Mr. Diefenbaker

public interest, but they are placed on the order paper and a lot of time and money has to be spent in answering them.

We have provided answers to questions and we shall continue to do so. We have already answered over 900 questions this session—60 per cent of the questions appearing on the order paper have been answered. We cannot, of course, answer them in advance. At every moment of every day there will be unanswered questions appearing on the order paper. That is inevitable. We have, however, answered a very large number of them, and we shall continue to do so. We shall have answered more questions before the session ends. If the right hon. gentleman feels there is to be a dissolution on Thursday, or that parliament has very few days to live, I suggest to him that when any parliament ends, either by dissolution or the adjournment of a session, a number of questions are left unanswered. But the record of the government is extremely good in this respect.

The right hon. gentleman has allowed his suspicious mind to wander all over the order paper. With that suspicious attitude of his, he found some evil purpose lurking behind the questions left unanswered. There was the question of the rents which are paid or the square footage rented in a particular building. Mr. Speaker, that information will be made available.

An hon. Member: When?

Mr. MacEachen: Nobody is hiding it. The right hon. member is creating straw men, trying to make us believe there are sinister motives behind the failure to answer some of the questions which take time and money to answer. I ask him to dispel this suspicious attitude from his mind. If he were to do so he would have better peace of mind as he contemplates the election date which is so much his preoccupation these days.

● (1602)

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, there is just one comment I should like to make with respect to something which was said by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen). Before I come to the point which concerns me, may I just say that I assume that if that question about mother tongue had included one about one's mother tongue being Gaelic, the Deputy Prime Minister would not have been so offended.

However, what concerns me is a particular statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister. If I remember correctly, he said that perhaps we should look at these questions before they go on the order paper.

What does the Deputy Prime Minister have in mind? Is he going to have the government censor questions and deny members the right to put them on the order paper? It seems to me that if members put irresponsible questions on the order paper, they have to take responsibility for that in the eye of the public, but I have to say that I do not like the idea or the suggestion that some government body or board somewhere should have the power to review our questions. That would mean censoring or eliminating questions which members wish to put on the order paper.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is sound indeed. I do not think that the government House leader ought to condemn too quickly opposition members of parliament for their questions. He ought not to condemn members at all for putting questions on the order paper. If there is to be a condemnation, let the government House leader speak to the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) about the host of questions which appear in his name starting at page 76 of the order paper. Let me indicate just briefly what question No. 62, in the name of the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow), asks, as follows:

For the fiscal year 1975-1976, what contracts for professional services were let (a) for studies, surveys and analyses into present or future policies, programs or information analysis, and their efficiency and effectiveness (b) into the examination of the administration or internal operation of the Post Office Department?

That question has been kicking around unanswered on the order paper since October 18, 1977. I see the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) is waving his arms as if he has taken leave of his senses. I could talk about one of his questions which appears on the order paper. There is a whole host of questions on the order paper, asked not just by members of the opposition but by members of the government as well. All members of parliament have the right to have their questions answered, and if we review the order paper, we find that there are many questions.

It is the responsibility of members of parliament, not that of the government House leader or of anyone else, to see that their questions are proper, but it is the responsibility of the government to answer questions on the order paper.

I speak now as a member of parliament from the national capital area. I see from the order paper that there are questions put there by the hon. member for Huron-Middlesex (Mr. McKinley) with regard to rentals of buildings and square footages. At a time when departments are leaving this city in droves, and when we are in the midst of a decentralization program which is not even supported by some members on the government side, it is not appropriate for the government House leader to say that certain questions are inappropriate and that they ought not to be answered. The right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) is absolutely right, they should be answered, and those answers would be fairly revealing to the people of the national capital area.

While I am on my feet, let me deal with one other matter with respect to questions, and that is the whole matter of starred questions. Starred questions are answered here in the House rather than by way of written answers. By their very nature they require some immediacy in terms of dealing with them. I have noticed that they have been treated neither as important nor urgent in terms of the answers given by the government.

All members of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments dealt unanimously with the right to freedom of information. The Canadian Bar Association, labour unions, and every responsible organization which appeared before that committee have indicated that opportuni-