

*Privilege—Mr. Coates*

(Mr. Reid) indicated would be given today. I accept the comments as being in the nature of a grievance. I think hon. members well know that the rules and Standing Orders of the House do not in any way compel the giving of answers by the government, no matter whether the question be an oral one put during the question period, a written question on the order paper or a question marked with an asterisk, that is, a starred question.

I am commenting now only on whether a question of privilege has been established and whether, in the final analysis, the Chair has any authority to compel answers. I am sure hon. members know full well that there is no compulsion under the Standing Orders and therefore no authority vested in the Chair to compel, in any way, the government to give answers. The government's choice as to whether to give answers is its own. Comments which have been made may be legitimate about the performance and discharge of that responsibility on the part of the government, but the Standing Orders stop short of providing the Chair with power of compulsion. I want hon. members to understand this clearly. The regulations and practices of this House stop far short of vesting authority in the Chair to compel any answers or to put any time limit on the giving of answers. If it is the feeling of hon. members that that should be done, that the Standing Orders of this House should be changed in such a way as to provide for compulsion, then so be it.

● (1520)

With regard to the point that it is not required within the Standing Orders at the present time, I wish to make it absolutely clear that I cannot see a question of privilege involved in this regard, nor can I see any authority for the Chair to compel action to be taken under the Standing Orders as they stand at the present time.

**Mr. Cossitt:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. If the hon. member has a different question of privilege, I will be glad to hear it.

**Mr. Cossitt:** Mr. Speaker, I tried to rise earlier with regard to the matter of gifts which was raised a moment ago. I feel I have a legitimate question of privilege in this regard. Some weeks ago an announcement was made by the office of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), in keeping with the increased tendency toward the governing of Canada by the Prime Minister's office, that guidelines were being drawn up to set forth conflicts of interest with regard to gifts received by the Prime Minister, members of the cabinet and their wives. As yet, these guidelines have not been presented to this House.

All we have been presented with are answers like the one given today to the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates), which answer is ridiculous and flaunts the privileges of every member of this House. I do not know if we have to wait until every member of the cabinet has had a Japanese junket, been given a swimming pool or a flight on a whisky jet—but it is time the government got off the seat of its pants and provided this House with proper conflict of interest guidelines.

**Mr. Speaker:** Orders of the day.

[Mr. Speaker.]

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

## EGG MARKETING

## CONCURRENCE IN FIRST REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE

**Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East)** moved that the first report of the Special Committee on Egg Marketing presented to the House on Monday, December 16, 1974, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) was in the House earlier. I hope he will be here later to participate in this debate. Let me say at the outset that although my motion calls for concurrence in the committee's report, the reason I am putting forward the motion is to get the report before the House. I very much regret that this step was not taken by the chairman of the special committee or one of the government supporters on the special committee; hence, I moved the motion as a means of getting the report before the House so that it can be the subject of debate.

The special committee was set up on October 17 last with specific terms of reference. It was, first, to examine the operations of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency and, second, the performance of the several authorities having responsibility with respect to those operations. There was no quarrel with the terms of reference. They were sufficiently wide in scope to give the committee the latitude it needed to embark upon this very important inquiry. Where we did, and do quarrel is with respect to the very narrow time-frame placed upon the committee by the government. The committee was instructed to report back to the House on or before December 16, 1974. This meant we had less than two months in which to conduct our inquiry.

I ask hon. members to imagine a judicial inquiry or a royal commission inquiry being asked to embark upon an investigation of this magnitude and being told to hear the evidence, draft a report and present it to the government within two months. No judge or any other public-minded person in Canada would be party to such an inquiry. Yet that was precisely the position in which the special committee found itself. During the 24 days of the committee's public sittings we heard 73 witnesses and we received 173 briefs. The witnesses who appeared before the committee made oral presentations and they were subject to cross-examination. As far as the briefs were concerned, it was up to the members of the committee to examine them in the best way they could within the very narrow time limits imposed by the order of reference.

I think it is generally agreed that the members of the committee worked hard. In fact, this was one of the hardest working committees on which I have served. I can also say—and I am sorry the hon. member is not in the House—that the committee was presided over by a very fair, impartial and competent chairman. I refer, of course, to the hon. member for Argenteuil-Deux-Montagnes (Mr. Fox).

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!