

There is no question in my mind that this situation interferes with my privileges and with the privileges of all members in the House of Commons in that it limits our ability to operate as we should in our capacity as members.

I ask, Madam Speaker, that all files of the Privy Council office be sealed and placed under guard, pertaining to this subject, to prevent any possible deliberate destruction this afternoon for the purpose of hiding evidence. I also realize, Madam Speaker, that it may be necessary to reserve judgment for a day—or even two days, I do not know—on the point that I have raised because you will no doubt wish to examine a copy of the document, hear other argument, and consult precedents. Therefore I ask to be permitted to reserve my right to move a motion that this be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections in the event that it should be decided that I have a prima facie case of privilege.

Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I should like to say a few words in reply to the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) so that you may consider the point he has raised. The hon. member apparently has quoted from a document which he cannot table under the rules of this House, although I suppose he could append it to *Hansard*. It is a document whose veracity has not been determined so we are not sure what he is reading from, or who wrote the document. We are not even sure of the origin of the document.

As I have pointed out before, Madam Speaker, the government tries to answer all questions of all hon. members. In particular, the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville and I have been talking about this on the floor of the House for a number of weeks. I should like to point out that we have answered about 56 per cent of the questions posed by the hon. member. He asked 242 questions out of the 1,854 on the order paper. I grant that we have answered 69 per cent of all questions, so his proportion is slightly less, but I can assure him that we do not discriminate between members.

I can categorically deny that any instructions have been issued to me, or by me as the person responsible in this House for tabling these questions, concerning the answers, the form of answers, or the people who should be answered or in what priority. I categorically deny that. This is a wild allegation of the sort we are used to hearing from the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville.

An hon. Member: Right on!

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Collenette: It does concern me that there are some questions on the order paper that have not been answered for a long time, in particular questions Nos. 1, 4, 5, 15, 22, and a few others in the two digit range. It is true that they are all in the name of the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville but he should not imply that there is any conspiracy afoot. It so happens that many of the questions he asks are so complex that it takes a lot of work and a lot of money to get the answers. I think I have proven by what I have just said that we

Privilege—Mr. Cossitt

have done a reasonably good job of answering his queries over the last few months, and I undertake to achieve even better results for the hon. member.

It is my contention that the hon. member does not have a question of privilege. He is being treated in the same way as all members of the House; that is, we try to answer his questions along with those of other hon. members without bias or limitation.

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) has informed me that he would be prepared to agree to append the document that he dealt with, to *Hansard*. I hope the government is agreeable that this be done. Let us start right there, so that this Privy Council document to which he referred is available. I trust there will be agreement by the government.

The issue is not the number of questions that have been answered; the issue is not the cost of answering questions; the issue is not even the right of a member to ask questions, and the issue, I must say, is not whether instructions have been given to a parliamentary secretary. The issue, Madam Speaker, is the existence of a document that is now on record in the House, whether the parliamentary secretary knows about it or not, which makes special reference to a special kind of question and which, because the answer may be inconvenient, gives special instructions from the government or a senior public servant within the government, or within the Privy Council office.

The question, therefore, is not how good the government has been about answering questions in terms of numbers; it goes far beyond that. We are really talking now about whether, as a result of a statement, a position, a document or something that exists, the right of the member of Parliament has been impeded not just to put questions on the order paper but to have some expectation of answers to those questions.

The allegation made by the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville is quite clear, and it cannot go unanswered, that there is a special instruction—the parliamentary secretary has indicated only that he does not know about it—that exists within the Privy Council. That is the allegation, and that allegation must be answered.

I do not know how one can argue that this is not a question of privilege. I refer to Beauchesne, the fourth edition, page 59, citation 70, as follows:

Points of order are questions raised with the view of calling attention to any departure from the Standing Orders or the customary modes of proceeding in debate or in the conduct of legislative business and may be raised at any time by any member, whether he has previously spoken or not.

• (1520)

I am sure that in every free Parliament anywhere in the world it is not customary to have a government direct an injunction that questions cannot be answered against a particular member of Parliament whom they do not like. I think the issue is quite important. It is not an issue of costs. The hon. member for Leeds-Grenville is prepared to stand and tell his constituents: "Of course, it costs money to answer questions."