

Points of Order

that questions dating back to 1977 should still be on the order paper. I should like somebody to instruct the parliamentary secretary to give some kind of explanation why they are refusing to answer question No. 179.

Mr. Lang: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie) has just raised a point of order. He is able to rise in his place every day, according to our procedures, and make the kind of accusations that he has just made. Each day the questions are called and each day the question is put whether the remaining questions shall be allowed to stand. At that time any members who have any grievances about the way they have been treated in respect of questions are able to say so.

There has never been any authority in the Chair to compel answers to questions, either written or oral. There is no adjudication that I know of that could be made, for example, on whether an answer had in fact been made, if that power or authority did exist in the Chair. So there is a sanction upon the process of answering questions. It is a political sanction and the criticism that the hon. member now raises is one that has to be answered in the public domain, but there is no procedural authority in the Chair to compel answers to questions.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie), I had thought that he would have withdrawn his question because some time ago in this House he expressed impatience that it had not been answered. He said that because it had not been answered he would refer the matter and the question to the RCMP, and had done so.

● (1520)

Later in this House I asked the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) whether there had been a report. The Solicitor General reported that the RCMP had investigated the matter and there was nothing to it at all. He had his answer. If he still wants his original question to be answered, I suppose I can oblige him, but surely he has already used another procedure, followed another route. He has had his answer yet he persists.

Mr. Dean Whiteway (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the parliamentary secretary to questions Nos. 580 and 581 standing in my name. I submitted those questions on November 16. Over a month ago the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Andres), in answer to a similar complaint of mine, said I would have an answer soon. These are questions which are important to all Canadians. They are in regard to the government's propaganda wing, namely the Canadian Unity Information Office, and have to do with the cost to the Canadian taxpayers.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is in his place, and this is of some interest to him. I think that Canadians have the right to know the cost and the other information I am seeking in these questions. I say to the parliamentary secretary that I

hope before this parliament is dissolved the government will see fit to answer questions Nos. 580 and 581.

Mr. McKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on this point again. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) stated that I posed a question to the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) about question No. 179 concerning the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale) using the DOT telex. I never posed any questions to the Solicitor General at all. I asked the RCMP to investigate whether there were any infractions under the Criminal Code. They told me there was none. That in no way answers my question whether the hon. member for Assiniboia has the authority to use the DOT telex or whether government members have the privilege to use the DOT telex to send out political messages. The Minister of Transport is confused. I posed no questions at all to the Solicitor General.

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago you said that we could bring up this issue of unanswered questions on moral or political grounds. I do not think that the government has failed to answer my questions for those reasons; I think it is more incompetence than anything else.

I have had some 16 questions on the order paper since November 1 starting at No. 446 through and including No. 463. These questions have to do with the amount of money paid in the constituency as legal fees by the government. I point out that I asked a similar question in 1973. At that time I needed to ask only one question, namely how much had the government paid in legal fees in my constituency. The parliamentary secretary of the day listed all the departments, and about two months later I received a complete and full answer. I believe I asked the same question in 1975. At that time the government decided that I would have to define each and every department and Crown corporation that I wanted to know about. I did so and I received a complete answer to every one.

I raised the same type of question on November 1 last year. I have received about half a dozen answers, five of them nil returns. I received one from CMHC explaining legal fees they have paid to various people, but it was not stated how much. I am curious about the incapacity of the government to answer that type of question. The government was formerly able to answer such questions without any problem. It seems its competence is sagging. Could the parliamentary secretary restore some image of competence to the other side?

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds): Mr. Speaker, I join those who seem to be voices crying in the wilderness on this side of the House when it comes to asking why questions have not been answered. The first six pages on the order paper contain questions of mine which have been outstanding in some cases for up to two and three years. When I raised this point earlier the parliamentary secretary told me the reason is that it takes time to compile information, etc.

However, may I very quickly draw attention to three or four of these questions to show they are not ones it would take a lot