

Mr. MEIGHEN: His words are down and his words are "We will not answer it in that form".

Mr. FIELDING: Exactly.

Mr. MEIGHEN: And then he says, "I have answered".

Mr. FIELDING: That is the answer.

Mr. MEIGHEN: If the government is entitled to do that, I think, Mr. Speaker, your well known capacity to hunt for precedents will be taxed in vain. If he says, "We will not answer it in this form", and instructs that the records of the House show that that is an answer, then the whole practice of questioning falls to the ground, and the government has it in its power to deny everything, giving no reasons whatsoever.

Mr. FIELDING: Most certainly—

Mr. MEIGHEN: If it is a matter of length, if the minister has said the answer is going to be too long and entail too much work, then the government can say, "Stands as order for return", and the House has no alternative. That is the only reason the minister has given for his very strange attitude. If that is the objection to the question, all right, the government has its alternative, it can stand as an order for return, but the government has no right to say "We will not answer it in its present form, we do not like it, and we say that is our reason—"

Mr. FIELDING: I am surprised at the hon. gentleman. It is in his power and in the power of any member of the House to frame a question as he pleases, and it is the right of the government to say whether they will answer it in that form or not. We take the liberty to say that if this is put in the form of a motion we would bring down the information.

Mr. MEIGHEN: That is the same thing as having it stand as an order for return.

Mr. FIELDING: No.

Mr. MEIGHEN: What is the difference?

Mr. FIELDING: As a question I can not amend it, but as a motion before the House I can ask the House to amend it. That is the difference.

Mr. MEIGHEN: It is not of the nature of a motion. It is in the nature of an inquiry.

Mr. FIELDING: Well, I have answered.

Mr. MEIGHEN: If the hon. gentleman is satisfied, I do not think he will be proud of the record when it appears in print.

[Mr. Fielding.]

Mr. FIELDING: Very well.

Mr. SPEAKER: If hon. members will look at Rule No. 37, paragraph 3, they will find the following:

If in the opinion of Mr. Speaker a question on the order paper put to a Minister of the Crown is of such a nature as to require a lengthy reply, he may, upon the request of the government, direct the same to stand as a notice of motion, and to be transferred to its proper place as such upon the order paper, the Clerk of the House being authorized to amend the same as to matters of form.

Para. 4. If the question is of such a nature that in the opinion of the Minister who is to furnish the reply such reply should be in the form of a return, and the Minister states that he has no objection to laying such return upon the Table of the House, his statement shall, unless otherwise ordered by the House, be deemed an order of the House to that effect, and the same shall be entered in the Votes and Proceedings as such.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I am quite prepared to abide by either one.

Mr. SPEAKER: Then my ruling is that it comes under paragraph 3. It will stand as a notice of motion.

Mr. MEIGHEN: For return?

Mr. SPEAKER: As a notice of motion. The other one is in the form of a return. One is the notice of motion, and the other one is the form of return.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Then it stands as a notice of motion.

Mr. SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr. MEIGHEN: That is satisfactory.

Mr. SPEAKER: It stands as a notice of motion.

MILITIA AND DEFENCE DISBURSEMENTS

Mr. BOYS:

1. What expenses, payments or disbursements of any kind have been made since April 1, 1922, out of other moneys than those included in the amounts voted by Parliament for the Department of Militia and Defence in respect of items or charges paid in the fiscal year 1920-21 out of moneys voted for the Department of Militia and Defence?

2. Under what authority were such moneys so paid from other votes, and why was the change made?

3. Were objections offered by the Department of the Auditor General to payments being so made or to other attempts to make similar payments? If so, in what cases?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I think this question was called yesterday and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Graham) asked that it be allowed to stand so that he could really understand what the hon. gentleman wished by his first question. He asked the hon. member to put it in different language, so that he would be able to give him the information. The question does not quite convey what is desired.