

Order Paper Questions

receive it within 45 days. There is absolutely no excuse for not giving us the information.

Mr. Alex Kindy (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize what has been said. I think it is essential for the Government to respond within 45 days to a question that is put on the Order Paper.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kindy: I think we brought in parliamentary reform so that Members could really contribute to the process. Thank you.

Mrs. Campbell (South West Nova): We are paying the civil service to get the answers.

Mr. Speaker: This is not the first time that this matter has been brought to the attention of the Chair. I said some time ago that whatever the rule may be—and I will refer to the rule in a moment—there is no power given under the rule to the Chair to order the Government to produce an answer within 45 days. I want that clearly understood, not just by Hon. Members but by anybody who may be watching or listening.

The second thing I want to point out is that if one looks carefully at Standing Order 39 which is headed "Written Questions" and comes to paragraph 5, this is exactly what it says:

A Member may request that the Ministry respond to a specific question within forty-five days by so indicating when filing his or her question.

I draw to the attention of Hon. Members and to all others who are interested that "a Member may request". As I read that, that is not a right. It is a request. There is a distinction.

Having said that, there is no doubt in my mind that the intention of the Reform Committee in bringing about this rule was that when written questions are put forward, it is the better part of virtue for the Government to reply within 45 days if the Member has asked for that.

An Hon. Member just said something about who has to prepare the returns. Ultimately, under our system, of course the Minister is responsible. But I hope that somebody notices that the Speaker has observed that people who are in the service of the public, who have to bring these answers back, ought to take a look at this rule

and realize that it does not just hang there without any purpose.

As far as I am concerned, I do not think it is appropriate that the time of this House has to be taken up by Members having to get up and ask why somebody has not given them the answer.

The Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) made it quite clear. If there is a case where something is so complicated that it is impossible for the Government to give the answer within 45 days, I think Hon. Members would be patient and understanding if the Parliamentary Secretary or Minister got up and said that that was the dilemma they found themselves in.

For the most part, there is no real reason in the world why these answers cannot be given. As I say, I cannot order them to be given because I do not have the power. But I do ask that those who are asked to prepare these answers take a look at this rule and realize that when they do not get the answer back to their Minister in time, they are putting all of us through a lot of difficulty and taking up the time of the House, because undoubtedly there will be more points of order raised on exactly this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Short of the authority to order somebody to do anything, I cannot make my own feelings on this matter any more clear than I have just done.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I am asking for your indulgence. I recognize the very learned ruling that Your Honour has just made, but one of the restrictions that Members are under as a result of the reform, that included the rule to which Your Honour just referred, is one that limited the number of questions that each Member could have on the Order Paper at any one time. We are only permitted four.

Perhaps Your Honour, to ameliorate the situation for Members, could turn a blind eye to that part of the rule if the Government is going to be permitted to turn a blind eye to the request of Members that the question be