

Privilege

I am in perfect agreement with the minister and with the Speaker that the minister could stand up and say he was not answering that question. He has a perfect right to do that. But I submit that he cannot stand up and say that he is answering the question by saying: "I don't have to answer the question because there is a bill sitting there on the table", which may or may not deal with the subject matter, but certainly was not dealing with the subject matter on the day when I put the question.

So the question is in order. I ask the minister to simply stand in the House and indicate that he was wrong. I do not think we should establish a bad precedent like this.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, talk about a tempest in a teapot. The hon. member stood and said this was a point of privilege but I have yet to hear any evidence from him or any suggestions that it is a point of privilege. So I hope you would acknowledge that it is not a point of privilege.

Second, he described his question as a supplementary to the question asked by the hon. member for Vancouver East. I think checking into the two questions shows that it was not supplementary in any way, shape or form.

Mr. Waddell: That's not the issue.

Mr. Andre: Now he says that is not at issue. Whether his question was supplementary or not is not at issue. He acknowledges that there is no obligation on the part of the government to answer the question anyway, so how can he suggest that an unsatisfactory answer somehow reflects on his privileges, since no answer is a satisfactory answer, or anything else.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder if I could help the hon. government House leader? The hon. government House leader has remarked that this probably is not a question of privilege. It is not a question of privilege; it is a point of order.

But, now that we are into it, I am certainly going to hear it. The hon. government House leader.

Mr. Andre: As I was saying, I think it is a specious point of order anyway.

Perhaps the hon. member will also withdraw his comments where he says "the government has awarded some indexing" and appreciate that in fact the indexing of judges' salaries is a result of an act of Parliament and

not a decision by this government to do anything, not something that can be changed. That is another reason why the question was inaccurate because of its implications or imputations that somehow a decision was made.

I well acknowledge that I was of the opinion that questions, which do occur frequently on here, that deal with legislation that is before the House were out of order. Frankly I think they should be. I think that Question Period should be restricted to what Beauchesne describes Question Period as, namely an opportunity to seek information from the government that cannot be sought in other ways, such as questions on a bill then before the House. I do not think Question Period should be used for that purpose.

But we can talk about those rules at another occasion.

• (1510)

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. The hon. member has raised a matter by way of a question of privilege and I have pointed out that it is not a question of privilege, it is a point of order. Surely his colleagues ought to allow the government House leader to respond. The hon. government House leader.

Mr. Andre: As I was saying, I was of the opinion that a question dealing with legislation ought not to be put in Question Period. That is why we have debates. Question Period is not described in Beauchesne and ought not, I believe, be an addition to the debates we have here on legislation.

As to the question of the quality of my answer, all right, I will concede it could have been a higher quality answer. I get back to the comments I made yesterday which the hon. member heard. In fact no answer is required. I was mistaken in suggesting that I did not have to answer. Instead of this answer, please take it out and say my answer is no answer.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the government House leader, if I understand him correctly, has done what needed to be done, that is acknowledged that the answer he gave in using a procedural argument for not answering when in fact all he had to do was not answer. That is what is at stake here. We acknowledged yesterday that no minister, according to the rules of this House, has to answer a question when it is asked.