

Question of Privilege

studied, and particularly the suggestion made by the hon. member for Edmonton West on this point.

In the first instance I should say that the responsibilities of the Speaker with respect to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act are limited. Under section 6 (2), two members of a provincial commission other than the chairman and the representation commissioner are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons. As hon. members know, under the act the various commissions send copies of their reports to the representation commissioner, who in turn transmits a copy to the Speaker under section 19 (1) of the act. It is the Speaker's duty thereupon to lay the report before parliament.

The Speaker then has a further obligation under section 20 of the act to receive objections, and on the conclusion of consideration of those objections he must refer the reports, objections and relevant debates of the House of Commons back to the representation commissioner. These various obligations, it seems to me, constitute the responsibilities of the Speaker in these matters, and I am afraid I cannot accept the suggestion of the hon. member for Edmonton West that I can compel the commissions to answer questions raised in the house affecting the conduct of their responsibilities.

Hon. members will have noted that the Secretary of State, in dealing with question No. 48 in the name of the hon. member for London and questions 202 and 212 in the name of the hon. member for Edmonton West, in effect stated that she was not in a position to make replies. Therefore I think we have to assume that the questions have not in fact been answered by the Secretary of State, and she has given certain reasons for adopting this attitude.

That being the case, I do not see how the Chair can compel the minister to answer, and I need only refer the hon. member to citation 181 (3) of Beauchesne's fourth edition, which is of course well known to the hon. member for Edmonton West and to all hon. members of the house, where it is stated:

A minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for his refusal, and insistence on an answer is out of order, no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such refusal. A member can put a question, but has no right to insist upon an answer.

I quite appreciate that in the case of the three written questions the Secretary of State

[Mr. Speaker.]

did indeed make a statement, but I do not think in reading that statement it can be regarded as an answer to the questions. It seems to me it merely takes the position that the minister cannot make an answer and, that being so, under the citation I have just quoted I fear I cannot accept the view that the hon. member for Edmonton West has a question of privilege. This applies equally to the hon. member for London.

I must say I have some understanding of and sympathy for the hon. members' position. While I have found that there does not seem to be a question of privilege in the matter raised, it does seem to me that the hon. members may very well have a grievance which they could legitimately raise at the first opportunity, or should they care to do so they might consider the advisability of placing on the order paper a motion for the production of papers, in which case it may be that the Governor in Council would produce the information sought through the Secretary of State, who under the statute is the channel of communication between the representation commissioner and the Governor in Council.

REDISTRIBUTION**ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN DEBATE ON
OBJECTIONS TO REPORTS**

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Public Works): On Monday last I proposed that the question of allocation of time for the consideration of objections under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act be referred to the business committee.

In accordance with subclause 3 of standing order 15A, the business committee is pleased to report that it is now unnecessary to make any recommendation for such allocation of time.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): In view of what the government house leader has just said, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if he would advise the house as to the sequence that will be followed in considering the objections according to provinces in the next few days.

Mr. McIlraith: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to do that. Today we will begin with consideration of the New Brunswick motion, then proceed to the objections concerning the Alberta redistribution and afterward those concerning British Columbia. Tomorrow, whether or not we have completed the British Columbia objections, we will take up the Ontario objections first. When the Ontario