

Inquiries of the Ministry

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): On this point of order, Mr. Speaker, I suggest the task might be made easier as soon as the opposition has learned to ask questions of the appropriate departments.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I understood when the program was announced that it was quite proper to ask questions, and if the minister concerned could not deal with them a parliamentary secretary would take the question as notice. Am I to understand that the program is being further refined by the Prime Minister, and that he is now suggesting questions relating to a particular department might be asked properly only on the day when the minister of that department is present?

Mr. Jack Horner (Crowfoot): I should like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister is nodding his head in approval of what the Leader of the Opposition just said. I should like to make it abundantly clear that the minister answering on agricultural problems is in attendance only three days a week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Surely that important industry demands more than three days a week from this government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Loûbinière): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few remarks on the point of order and on the statement of the right hon. Prime Minister.

He said that he would ask the opposition to make an effort so as to direct questions to the ministers concerned. I would like him to ask his ministers to make an effort so as to give correct answers to the questions they are asked. Otherwise, he thinks we are fools, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I had risen earlier in connection with the same point of order. On Monday the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was here very briefly and left before we had the opportunity to ask him a question. He was not here yesterday and has not been here today. I should like to know when the minister will be here so that he can be questioned.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps by unanimous consent the minister could be allowed to answer the question now.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): Perhaps in response to the inquiry by the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka I should point out that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is attending the meeting of the council of resource ministers. We hear a great deal from members on the other side about federal-provincial co-operation, and I think it is important that my colleague should be attending this meeting.

Mr. Ricard: Does that mean you don't believe in co-operation?

Mr. Bell: May I ask the house leader what happened to his expressed intention the other day to bring about a longer question period on Wednesday, when all the ministers are here?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): I indicated at the time that if hon. members wished I would make that offer to them; but they did not take it up. If they are prepared to reduce the question period on Monday to 40 minutes, the government would be quite prepared to agree to a one hour question period on Wednesday. Perhaps if there is general agreement to that proposition we might make the order right now for inclusion in the provisional rules.

Mr. Bell: As far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely necessary. For example, the Minister of Transport, who has a very important folio, has been away twice this week on days when he should have been here, and we shall not have the opportunity to see him again for another 10 days.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May I respectfully suggest that the house leaders get together on this point and try to agree which question periods should be either extended or limited.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) has just said that ministers are often busy outside the house. I think that all the members of the opposition as well as those on the government side of the house realize this.

However, according to the list, all the ministers are supposed to be in the house on Wednesday. Yet about half a dozen are missing today. Will they be here tomorrow? If half of the ministers who are supposed to be here are busy outside the house and some of the others are away, what is the use of