

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. If the question is important and urgent the hon. member should ask it in such a way that it will be acceptable to the Chair.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I will rephrase my question—

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): And don't be such a smart Aleck.

Mr. McGrath: What's that?

Mr. Trudeau: I say "and don't be such a smart Aleck".

Mr. McGrath: Obviously I hit a very sensitive area. What steps is the government taking to deal with the very serious financial crisis now developing in the provinces of New Brunswick and Newfoundland which is placing a very heavy burden on the peoples of those two provinces?

Mr. Trudeau: As I indicated on a couple of occasions a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, officials of all provinces are constantly meeting in Ottawa these days. They met yesterday and today, and I believe they are meeting tomorrow.

An hon. Member: Every room will be full of task forces.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL STAFF IN PASSPORT OFFICE

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I look at the Treasury Benches and I do not know to whom to direct this question, but since the Prime Minister has referred to hon. members as smart Alecks I will direct it to him in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Will extra staff be made available to the passport body, which is very far behind in its work? People all across Canada are finding it difficult to understand the interminable waits that have to be made, even with clear-cut applications?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I will refer the representation of the right hon. member to the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege affecting all hon. members of the house. This is the kind of nonsense this house is being subjected to by the government, in adopting the system of selective

Inquiries of the Ministry

appearances of ministers in the house. We are entitled to have answers to questions without waiting around until ministers gallivanting all over the world decide to return.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The Secretary of State is perambulating all the time, but I see that he is here today.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Surely the Prime Minister should not try to wipe aside a reasonable question by a facetious observation such as that.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am very impressed by the lecture of the right hon. member. The minister to whom he is referring is at present in Japan with three other ministers on very important business involving trade, external affairs and other aspects of Canadian policy. They had to go to Japan, and certainly it would be improper for the right hon. member to assert that the minister's absence, or the absence of any of them, would prevent the passport office from issuing passports.

I do submit that that office may be subjected to a little extra work issuing passports to members of the opposition travelling abroad, but I am sure that the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs will not prevent the passport office from hearing the representation of the right hon. member and from trying to expedite this matter as much as it can.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would the Prime Minister say who is acting as Secretary of State for External Affairs, so that we could communicate with him—because as one looks at these serrated ranks opposite he wonders where all the ministers are.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

ENGAGEMENT OF CASUAL EMPLOYEES

Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, the Postmaster General is looking very relaxed today and in view of that I would like to ask him a question concerning the large number of casual employees in the Post Office, something we have discussed on a number of previous occasions. Can the minister report to the house any recent information he has regarding this subject as it affects the postal service across Canada?