

Order Paper Questions

poor excuse; the government should follow proper parliamentary process.

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the gratuitous explanation which the hon. member has just given as to his imagined reasons why the answers to those particular questions have not yet been forthcoming in the House is just that—gratuitous and imagined. I think it is important to note that on the final day of the last session of this parliament we were in a position to provide responses to, I believe, nearly 600 questions on the order paper. On that day last fall I rose in my place and asked for the required unanimous consent to allow us to provide the answers to these questions; that unanimous consent was denied notably by the hon. member for Leeds. As a result, those questions could not be answered at that time.

It has been suggested that that really did not cause very great difficulty because all we needed to do was take a little correcting fluid and change the dates and the numbers of the questions, xerox them all over again and produce them in the House a few days later. This process, as those who have preceded me in the position of parliamentary secretary know, is not that simple; it does require that the questions be reprocessed. It is significant that most of these questions are not simple one-line questions requiring simple one-line answers. In many cases they are multiple part questions which are directed not just to one minister or to one agency but possibly to 40 or more agencies. We do require some time to reprocess and update these answers, to make the changes in the timeframe required so as to make sure the answers are complete and accurate in every respect. So it is not a simple job of xeroxing.

As I pointed out in the House last fall, the fact that the answers could not be given on the last day of the last session probably cost, in terms of manpower and office and clerical time, something in the order of \$170,000 to process the questions again. Many of these questions appeared on the order paper in the new session of parliament, along with some 2,300 new questions on the order paper. So we have a situation where there is a very substantial volume of work which has to be done.

If my memory serves me correctly, as at the beginning of this week something in the order of 2,700 questions had been asked in this session of parliament since it began last fall. It is significant that nearly 70 per cent of those questions have in fact been answered to this date, which leaves a small number outstanding at the moment. Many of the questions which are still outstanding appeared on the order paper only in the course of the last couple of weeks when many multiple part questions appeared on the order paper, adding to the list of questions which now have to be answered. There are not many in the category of questions outstanding for a lengthy period of time. I can assure Your Honour, the House and hon. members who have voiced their concern about this question today and in the past, that we are attempting to provide answers to all questions within the shortest possible time.

[Mr. Cossitt.]

● (1520)

Mr. Speaker: Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) had the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I rise to correct one thing said by the parliamentary secretary, which I believe is inaccurate in his quoting of my remarks.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cossitt: He has made a statement I did not make, and I feel I should have the right to correct it.

Mr. Speaker: That may be a matter of dispute between the parties, which can be taken up at some other time. Each has contributed to the point of order, and there is no machinery for the process to continue any farther than that.

Mr. Cossitt: Then, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) on a question of privilege.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I do not want to take any further time of the House, but I want to say that the questions I referred to were not the ones to which the parliamentary secretary referred. Therefore, I feel my remarks have been distorted.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Leeds is clearly taking up a disagreement with the hon. parliamentary secretary. That is a matter of debate and disagreement. It is not a matter of order and it is not a question of privilege.

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PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to the revised procedure for the month of June, I wish to inform the House that the questions to be raised at six o'clock p.m. are as follows: the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Robinson)—Health—Possibility of controlling use of tobacco; the hon. member for Pembina (Mr. Elzinga)—Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation—Basis on which funds distributed to provinces; and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles)—Veterans Affairs—Inquiry whether disability pension will be restored to 1972 value.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) raised some time ago a question of privilege in regard to the release of certain information in connection with the work of the subcommittee on penitentiaries. At that time, I indicated it