

Mr. Coates: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege relating to a matter raised earlier by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) that was brought to my attention in answer to question No. 1296 today. If you will examine question No. 1296 you will see that I asked very specifically for details in relation to gifts exchanged between members of our government and members of foreign governments when our government members are visiting foreign countries or members of other governments are visiting this country. In my question I sought to determine a number of things. I wanted to know, mainly, what moneys the taxpayers of Canada were putting up for gifts to foreign dignitaries. I was referring to gifts which such dignitaries receive in this country and to gifts which members of our government give to them when visiting other countries. As well, I wanted to know what happened to gifts received by representatives of our government.

● (1510)

The answer I received was pure gobbledygook. It says nothing except that the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp), who signed the order, states that there is no policy with respect to exchanging gifts. That, Mr. Speaker, is obvious. I submit that members of parliament are entitled to such information as I seek. The money for gifts given by our government members does not come out of the pockets of cabinet ministers; it comes out of the pockets of the taxpayers of this nation. Yet this government refuses to supply me with the detailed information I seek about the expenditures of those tax dollars. This is not the first time this has happened. The government is becoming more and more secretive and ever more reluctant to disclose information; and we have a legitimate right to such information.

The government is making a mockery of a procedure which is useful in eliminating debate in this chamber. We submit questions to be placed on the order paper for a very good reason: if they were not on the order paper, the answers would take up valuable time in the question period which is already too short. For a long time I have endeavoured not to misuse the question period and, whenever possible, in my search for information I have submitted written questions. The response to such questions has been inadequate. For example, not long ago there was a request for information and details about people taking language courses on either a short or a long-term basis. The answer was that: everybody taking a language course, regardless of where he may be, is treated as if he were still a member of the work force here in Ottawa. I point out that such a person might be in Quebec or in France. Nevertheless, that is all the information which was supplied.

If a question on the order paper is to be a useful tool for members of parliament, I suggest that you, sir, as our representative and spokesman should see to it that we are furnished with legitimate replies to our questions—and this is happening less and less frequently. The kind of garbage I was given as an answer today is just not good enough. Something must be done or the entire system under which we work will break down. We are not being treated fairly. The government is secretive—and it has no right to be secretive about how the taxpayers' dollars are

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spent. We want the facts. Having taken the time to formulate a question in detail, a question which is often based on research, we are entitled to an answer. The least we can expect is that the government will give us the information we seek. If we do not get it, the House will discover that every Monday and Wednesday at least half the day will be taken up by members of the opposition legitimately rising and complaining about the government not giving them information to which they are entitled.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same question of privilege. It has become obvious that the government is hiding information, concealing facts and refusing to produce any information that is available. For example, let me refer to the question I asked on November 8 last, three months ago. I knew what the answer was when I asked the question; I received it from a departmental official. I wanted to know the total amount paid to sculptors for the statues of the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen and the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent, and for the design proposal of the statue of the Right Hon. R. B. Bennett. The government hid that information for three months. I raised the matter recently and said there could be no excuse for this. The excuse, of course, is that the government is afraid to give us the answer; that is all. But that is not the way to treat parliament.

Today, according to the answer furnished, we learn that the sculptor, Marcel Braitstein of Sackville, New Brunswick, received \$48,000 for the statue of the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen. Sir, that was the greatest monstrosity ever produced—a mixture of Ichabod Crane and Daddy Longlegs. It is about nine feet high, and totally worthless. The government hid it for the last three or four years until we found out about it. Not only did the government decide that it could not set up such an object on Parliament Hill; it refused to give an answer for three months.

The next part of the answer dealt with the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent. Elek Imredy was paid \$56,000 for the statue. Then there was the monstrosity of a mock-up for the statue of the Right Hon. R. B. Bennett. It consisted of a mummy about three feet long, the identification of which might have been possible in the days of Tutankhamen, but not since. One, Elford Cox, of Willowdale, Ontario, was paid \$2,800 for this. Why was this information withheld? This is happening day after day. It shows that the government is determined not to answer anything that might embarrass it, or is determined to hide an answer as an order for return so that the people will not see it.

I know the government cannot answer some questions immediately. On November 6 I asked how many convictions for rape have been registered over a period of years and how many kidnapping convictions have been registered. Although the question was asked three months ago, the government is still working on it. One would think, if they had any regard for the administration of justice, that the information would have been available long ago. But we are told all this takes a long time.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Some hon. members have already contributed to the alleged point of order or question of privilege relating to questions which have been placed on the order paper, answers to which the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council