

Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Surely speeches of this character are out of order at question time.

Mr. Speaker: The question period may continue to be very interesting, provided we avoid some of the inconveniences which are being thrown in from time to time. An answer by a minister cannot be debated, and the same applies even if an hon. member does not get an answer. That is quite clear.

I have had occasion to read this before, but it seems to me that the more I read it the more useless it is. I will read it again. I have referred hon. members time and again to the rules which appear in *Beauchesne*, third edition. If at this time I have shown a spark of impatience I apologize because I take it that it is the prerogative of hon. members at their pleasure to abide by the rules or to try to keep away from them, and that it is my duty to try to bring them back. If the good will of the house is with me it is easy, but when that good will is withdrawn, no matter to what degree, it is much more difficult.

I refer hon. members to page 119 of *Beauchesne*, third edition, citations 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306 and 307 and others. I am going to read citation 307. It is in these words:

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 should like to add that it is quite erroneous for some hon. members to think that at question time they can ask any question they like. That is not so in the United Kingdom and it should not be so here.

Mr. J. C. Van Horne (Restigouche-Madawaska): I should like to direct another question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Is the minister aware that the answer he gave the house on February 19, on which date I was in my chair—

Mr. Sinclair: That was a rare occasion.

Mr. Van Horne: —gave us no information.

Mr. Lapointe: If my hon. friend was in his chair, as he puts it, I see no reason why he should have raised the question today, since he was going to get the same answer.

Mr. Van Horne: The minister is still not answering.

Mr. Lapointe: If I may be permitted, I have listened to your comments, Mr. Speaker,

on the type of questions that may be asked, and I should like to remark that I did not decline to answer the question. I did say to the hon. member that the government was still considering these representations made by the Legion.

Mr. Colin Cameron (Nanaimo): I have a question for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Has he received any representations from Canadian Legion branches since he gave his answer on February 19 and, if so, have they received any further consideration?

Mr. Lapointe: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did receive representations since the last time the question was put to me.

HEALTH INSURANCE

INQUIRY AS TO COMMENCEMENT OF PAYMENTS TO PROVINCES

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I now ask for an answer to my question of yesterday, when I asked the Minister of Finance whether it is true that payments under the hospital insurance plan cannot be made to any province until all six agreeing provinces have their plans in operation, or will it be made clear that once six provinces have agreed to the plan federal payments can and will be made to those provinces whose plans are in operation?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): My hon. friend has before him the proposal which was made to the provinces and given to parliament last January, and he likewise has before him the resolution which has to do with the hospital insurance proposal. I should think that from those two documents the answer is clear.

Mr. Knowles: May I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister of National Health and Welfare say when it is intended to proceed with the debate on the resolution to which he has referred?

Mr. Martin: That is a matter which the house leader and I have been discussing. I am sure my hon. friend will not be disappointed.

Mr. Knowles: May I ask a further supplementary question. Will it be proceeded with even if a sixth province does not indicate its agreement to the plan?

Mr. Martin: Surely by now my hon. friend has been convinced of the determination of the government in this matter.

Mr. Knowles: No, I have not.