

*Order Paper Questions*

(h) St. Catharines and, in each case, what (i) number and percentage of the applicants were successful (ii) was the total amount granted?

4. What (a) are the names and addresses of the successful applicants (b) was the nature of the projects approved and funded by the Ontario Region of the Non-Medical Use of Drugs Directorate in (i) 1974 (ii) 1975 (iii) 1976 (iv) 1977 to date?

Return tabled.

[English]

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

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Rynard:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I wish to bring to your attention a matter I raised first in this House on February 27, 1975, as reported in *Hansard*, page 3625, when I drew attention to the fact that a starred question which had been on the order paper nearly one month had not been answered, and I asked why. You replied at that time, Sir, that there is no rule saying starred questions must be answered within a certain time or, for that matter, answered at all. That opinion was expressed on February 27 as reported in the first and second columns of page 3625 of *Hansard*. I drew attention to the value of the starred question and wondered what was the value of asking a starred question if it need not be answered at all or if it had no status.

I believe, based on the custom of the House, that the starred question which came into being in 1910 is basically a question not put orally because the answer might require a more thoughtful reply, or some research might be needed in order to answer the question correctly. The answer to the question should contain the information desired and, there must be a certain urgency to the question. I am raising this matter because, for a long time, we have asked the procedure committee to deal with this matter and provide an answer on the point.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, our rules and customs naturally were based on those of the Mother of Parliaments. The practice throughout the British Commonwealth is that a member of parliament can put a question to a minister on a matter concerning his department. The late Sir Herbert Williams, who asked some 4,000 questions during his long parliamentary career, said that questions asked in the House are perhaps one of the most powerful implements of democracy.

As a matter of interest, the first question was asked in 1721 in the House of Lords, over 250 years ago.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that nothing could weaken the control of parliament more, or better destroy it, than the abolition or curtailment of the right of a member of parliament to ask a question in the House of Commons, a question to which he is entitled to expect an answer.

In the Mother of Parliaments all questions are written and the minister has two full days to answer. Those questions marked with an asterisk, the starred questions, require an oral answer. Otherwise, I understand the answers are printed in *Hansard*.

[Mr. O'Sullivan.]

In Canada we have the oral question. However, I think it would be wise to refer back to the practices which existed even before we were a united country, before Confederation. Let us see what happened when we were the province of Canada. At that time we operated under British rules as practised at Westminster. So far as I know all questions then were written. With the advent of Confederation in 1867, written questions only were allowed. In 1910, when Sir Wilfrid Laurier was Prime Minister, the starred question was introduced, with the hope that it would tend to reduce emphasis on oral questions which, for the first time, were creeping into parliamentary use.

Only in 1964 did the rules of this House give formal recognition to the oral question which had not been formally recognized before then. The oral question has been part of our practice for a number of years and is now firmly established in our procedure. The 1910 rules did not firmly establish the status of the starred question. In fact the private member was never able to enforce the right to ask a starred question, and ministers answered starred questions orally, or in writing, at their own discretion.

In the sessions immediately preceding the 1955 change in the rules, the right to ask a starred question seems briefly to have been regained. In the days of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the starred question had to be answered within one day. I point out that one of our Speakers ruled that starred questions were to be answered orally, and in 1955 five ministers drew attention to the fact that questions were starred when the answers were given orally.

In 1955 a special committee on procedure sought to establish more firmly the status of the starred question. It was then given a special place on the order paper on one day of the week. No member was to be allowed to have more than three starred questions at one time on the order paper. When I first came to the House as a member it was the custom, as it had been earlier, to answer starred questions within seven days. It was our custom to ask starred questions under certain conditions, and I point out that most of our parliamentary procedure has evolved from custom. Obviously, that which is customary and works should become part of the status quo. This applies, I suggest, to the starred question as we know it at present.

It is interesting to note that there were no starred questions in our parliament until 1910 or 1911, as I have already said, although written and oral questions evolved as a customary procedure. That shows what custom has done to our rules. Also, between 1929 and 1955, starred questions were not asked. In 1955 the procedure committee once more recognized the starred question.

I could show you, by referring to *Hansard*, that the starred question has been part of our procedure at least since 1957, that is to say, such questions could be answered. For example, in 1959 Mr. Chevrier commented on why certain starred questions had not been answered. Michael Starr, a minister at the time, also referred to the starred question, as did the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) in 1968. I