

Question of Privilege

was their relevancy on that occasion. This is not a precedent at all for either the seeking of the information the hon. member sought yesterday by question No. 288 or the observations which he has made this afternoon.

Mr. Fisher: I should like to draw your attention to the fact that it was not in debate that the answer was given. It was an answer to a formal question on the order paper, question No. 423, and the words contained in the answer given by the minister point out that the highest pension per month is the pension given to the former governor. The answer was quite explicit as to who got it.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member raises as a point of privilege, I take it, the right of the house to consistency in the reasons which are given by the ministry in declining to answer. It is recognized by the house that certain answers may very properly be withheld from public disclosure in the house because it would be contrary to the public interest or contrary to a practice which has been established. The ministry from time to time declines to answer on these or similar grounds. Whether there is any obligation on the part of the ministry which amounts to a privilege or right of the house, I would much doubt. But it is a rather novel point, and I will consider it.

May I at this time refer the house to Beauchesne's fourth edition, page 153, citation 181:

A minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for his refusal—

From that I take it that if the minister had declined to answer, there would have been no objection.

—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 think from this citation it is fairly clear that rights do not arise. If a member is dissatisfied with the answer to his question, it is proper for him to comment upon that at the appropriate time in debate, but it does not go so far as to permit him to raise his objection as a question of privilege. However, as I say it is a novel point, and I shall give the matter some consideration in case it should arise again.

MR. CHEVRIER—ALLEGED INCOMPLETENESS OF RETURN TO ORDER FOR PAPERS

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): I should like to raise a similar point concerning the production of papers. I moved on February [Mr. Fleming (Eglinton).]

28 for the production of papers and correspondence between the Minister of Transport and the president of Quebecair and certain other persons concerning the granting of exclusive rights to Quebecair to operate between Seven Islands and Quebec.

On March 14 the Secretary of State tabled the correspondence that took place, following that motion. I have the correspondence before me and it ends on November 10, 1961, although the motion was passed and the papers deposited on March 14, 1962. Therefore I think that by the order of the house I am entitled to the correspondence between November 10, 1961 and the date on which the order was passed and the papers were tabled. The last letter clearly indicates that there has been further correspondence, and I would just like to read one sentence from it. It is a letter dated November 10, 1961, and reads as follows:

(Translation):

Dear Mr. Crevier:

I am pleased to inform you that after a discussion with the chairman of the air transport board, I am in a position to tell you that the board will complete its economic survey of T.C.A. and Quebecair routes on the north shore of the St. Lawrence on Monday next, November 20—

(Text):

And this, sir:

(Translation):

and will then be able to submit to you written proposals.

(Text):

It follows from this that written proposals must have been made between November 10 and the time the motion was passed here. Not only were they made but these written proposals appeared in the press, and I think I am entitled to get the correspondence which transpired between November 10 and the time the motion was passed.

The authority on which I base my submission is citation 213 of Beauchesne, at page 178, which reads as follows:

If parties neglect to make returns in reasonable time, they are ordered to make them forthwith;

And this is the pertinent point:

or so much of returns as has not been made.

My point is that so much of this return has not been made, namely the correspondence between November 10, 1961, and the time the motion was passed in this house, that it can be ordered to be made by this house, if Your Honour so rules. In view of that fact I submit with deference that I should be given the remainder of the correspondence on this file.

Hon. Leon Balcer (Minister of Transport): If I may be allowed to speak on this matter,