

Privilege—Mr. Diefenbaker

Question No. 561 asks how many square feet are leased by the government in the Abrams Building, 2620 Sheffield Road, Ottawa. The next question we come to is No. 562, which asks how many square feet are leased by the government in the Ala Kantti-Liff building, 222 Somerset Street West, Ottawa. Question No. 563 asks how many square feet are leased by the government in the Allstate Building. It even designates the address on Carling Avenue so the civil servants would have no difficulty in knowing where the building is. The next question is how many square feet are leased by the government in the American Can Company building. The address is given on Spruce Street. Going on—how many square feet are leased by the government in the Aselford-Martin Building on Woodward Drive, Ottawa?

● (1542)

So it goes, page after page, the Bank Building, the Bank of Nova Scotia building, the Bayview Road building, the Beamish building. That information is available to the government. All they have to do is look at the figures in the departments.

Those questions go from No. 563 to No. 645. It is a strange thing. Apparently the government cannot read. They have seen these questions here for five or six months, but have not answered them. Then they talk about believing in freedom of information.

I could go through the entire list. There is only one reason why these questions have not been answered. It would be embarrassing to the government if the answers were given. You cannot run parliament in that way. When I was Prime Minister, the total expenditure in Canada was \$6 billion. Now it is over eight times that.

What is being paid for these various rentals? Why should that information not be available? Is it because it would reveal information to the Canadian people that would not be to the credit of the government? There can be no other explanation. Some questions will take time to answer, but that information is available in every department. I am not going to say more about that except to add that what this government is doing is hiding the information.

We are getting to the position today where you cannot believe the government. We had an example of that in the 1974 election. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), placing his hand over where his heart is, said that if he were re-elected they would not bring in wage and price controls. He pointed out the awful Conservative stand on that. Within a matter of weeks and months, he brought about that which he said he would never do. With that kind of leadership, it is no wonder we cannot get answers to these questions.

I can go on from there. Could it be suggested that the failure to answer these questions is that they have not the information? Parliament is being treated by this government as though it were a pawn. Mention was made today by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) that principles effective in the British parliament do not necessarily apply here. Principles of integrity do.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Mr. Diefenbaker: I want to point that out. One should not have to say that. Some ministers answer the questions. I could even give a list of them because it would not take me long. I think there are three or four who answer the questions. One sits directly opposite me at this moment.

It is deliberate. The concealment is flagrant. Hiding information is contempt of this parliament, a grievous contempt. Is it any wonder that the expenditures of the Government of Canada have gone up and up and up by billions? They are \$48,000 million this year. Since the present Prime Minister has been Prime Minister of Canada, they have gone up by approximately 78 per cent.

Hiding information enables the government to get away with these vast expenditures. We have now come to the point where this government treats this House with a disregard that I have never seen equalled. I have been here under three Prime Ministers and I have never seen anything to equal this. I remember Mackenzie King saying on one occasion, "We will give full information, by and large, excepting in connection with defence", which one could understand during days of war. Parliament got that information. It was the same under Mr. St. Laurent; meticulous, careful. We did not end a parliament with 1,450 questions unanswered. Never!

I witnessed something today that I did not think I would ever see, so unusual it was. When a parliamentary secretary to a minister starts to answer as to what the government is going to do, he has no such right. He does not sit in the cabinet. He is simply an assistant of the minister he represents. However, day after day one of the primary rules of parliament, that ministers ought to answer, is deliberately being set aside. Why? What does a parliamentary secretary know in connection with what the cabinet has done? He has no responsibility. All he has is a decorative position of giving assistance to the minister.

I made a mistake a while ago, and I am a Conservative. I mentioned the increase in the expenditures since the present Prime Minister became Prime Minister ten years ago. It is an 80 per cent increase, not the percentage that I gave speaking off the top of my head.

Because this government knows it can get away with this, it refuses to answer. It deliberately neglects to answer questions, giving parliament information to which it is entitled. Do you think it will hurt anybody? Will it hurt the security of Canada if we find out that a favourite landlord of the government receives a tremendous price for a rental and that an equivalent rental is only half that amount? It would not hurt the reputation of those landlords to have the truth out.

With all the power at my command, I condemn this practice, whereby when this House ends, whether it be on Thursday or Friday, of 1,500 questions unanswered, although the people have the right to that information, they will have no information on them. If this is the way they treat parliament, then no wonder the expenditures have increased as they have over and over again, year by year.