

Privilege—Mr. Hnatyshyn

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, since the President of the Privy Council has answered more than I asked and had dealt with the business for the remainder of the session, may I ask, very seriously and very earnestly, whether the business between now and the end of the session will include a bill to implement the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs having to do with former prisoners of war?

An hon. Member: Say yes.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I suppose if we did not adjourn for a very long time and sat during Christmas and New Year's, that would not be impossible. It was not my intention to call such a bill, if one were prepared, before we adjourned for Christmas.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, may I say that I asked whether we could be assured of having that bill before the end of the session.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, that matter is still under consideration.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the government House leader whether he can give us some explanation as to why we must be asked to give special leave for the tabling of these regulations tomorrow night. Why have they not been tabled already, and why do they have to be tabled in the evening? Is it because they can't stand the light of day?

Mr. Sharp: The reason is very simple, Mr. Speaker: these regulations could have an effect upon the stock market.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order I should like to ask the government House leader a question in respect of Bill C-58. I do so on behalf of the people who are to be directly affected by this bill, since it was to become operative on January 1, which obviously cannot be the case now. May I ask whether for all intents and purposes the bill will be considered a tax bill and will become operative as of January 1 regardless of whether or not parliament has dealt with it?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, this is a tax bill and the same principles will apply to it as to any other bill brought forward in this way. The date January 1 is in the bill, and that is the intention of the government. That is why I made it very clear by saying we would continue with this bill and no one should be under any misapprehension about our intentions.

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PRIVILEGE**MR. HNATYSHYN—OBLIGATION OF MINISTERS TO ANSWER ORAL QUESTIONS**

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege to seek your direction in respect of a matter that has occurred from time to time and to which I have alluded on previous occasions. This related

[Mr. Stanfield.]

to the whole proposition during the question period of the obligation of ministers to answer questions, particularly when the obligation is by virtue of an undertaking by a minister to give an answer.

The point I raise is simply this. Your Honour has made it quite clear on previous occasions that a minister is not necessarily obliged to answer questions, and I suppose that is the prerogative of those on the treasury benches, under the rules; but when a minister undertakes to make an answer, it seems to me that he or she abuses the privileges of the House if in fact the answer is not forthcoming within a reasonable period of time, preferably on the floor of this House as opposed to some form of private communication. It has been pointed out to me very forcefully by colleagues that the idea of the question period is not to receive a written letter in response to a question; that is not the reason we raise these questions on the floor of the House. We expect, and deserve, an answer in the House.

I would ask Your Honour to indicate, by way of guidance, whether when a minister undertakes to give an answer there is a firm obligation, and whether if there is an obligation and a failure to so comply with the undertaking, it would constitute an abuse of the privileges of this House and a reflection on the rights of individual members, particularly those of us in the opposition who attempt in our own way to keep the government within bounds of reasonable action.

● (1510)

Mr. Lang: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, I should simply like to observe, since it implicates ministers, that there is some difficulty in ministers rising during the question period to give answers to previous questions, because of disorder that is created in the question period. Furthermore, I should like to observe, in relation to the very interesting comment by the hon. member, my friend from Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn) that the question period is designed to get these kind of answers on the floor of the House. I would suggest to him that if he would adapt the practice, that is shared by only a few of his colleagues, of giving notice to ministers about questions, he would find that answers could be given much more often on the floor of the House without a delay, therefore, causing confusion at a later date. That kind of habit and practice would be very much welcomed.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn) has raised a point of order that has been raised previously. It touches on a difficulty with our oral question period. Often a question is asked to which the minister really is not expected to have the answer in detail on the day in question, and the minister quite frequently makes the answer that not having the information available to him, he will seek the answer and bring it to the attention of the House at a later time. In that situation I follow the practice of not allowing supplementaries on such occasions because, presumably, on a later occasion the matter will be followed up by a further answer and it is on that later occasion the hon. member will want to have the opportunity for supplementary questions.

However, it also raises the problem, when that undertaking has been given, that there does not seem to be a