

my job as an opposition Member and in particular as environment critic.

Some of us remember in the days when the Conservatives were sitting on the opposition side of the House, a gentleman now deceased who was the Member for Leeds—Grenville, made himself a fair reputation across the country not necessarily by questions that he asked in the House of Commons but by the information he was able to garner by astute Order Paper questions. That individual was a gentleman by the name of Tom Cossitt. I know that we are not supposed to name names in the House of Commons, I daresay that if Mr. Cossitt is watching us today he is probably literally rolling over in dismay at what his own Government is about to attempt to perpetrate on the people of Canada.

We in the Opposition have agreed to a number of limitations on our freedom of speech in this place. One of those limitations involves a limitation on the amount of time that we can ring the bells. That was agreed to in the unanimous view that we would try to proceed with the business of Parliament and not tie Parliament up.

Some of us may have argued individually against that view because we felt we were giving up a long-standing right that was not being returned in kind. Nonetheless, we have also in this Parliament seen limitations on our capacity to ring the bells. We have seen limitations on our capacity to put petitions forward.

While those limitations may initially have been suggested to expedite the process and to limit the possibility of phoney petitions, I, and I daresay other Members, have probably seen situations in which legitimate petitions were tossed out because they did not have the proper wording about the shewing forth of Her Majesty's—whatever the wording is. They did not sheweth forth. Perhaps they had the wrong grammar.

I think the intention of these so-called reforms was to assist in the information gathering of Parliament in the same way as we get information by Order Paper questions. We are not putting questions on the Order Paper to tie up Parliament. Rather, we are legitimately using a vehicle to seek information. One by one we have seen the avenues available to Opposition Members for the securing of information being strangled. One of those avenues was by way of petition. Another avenue was by

*Point of Order—Mr. Cooper*

way of pressure which could be applied through things like bell ringing.

If the Government is so desperate to limit the free speech of Parliament that it is actually going to try to move to limit the capacity to answer questions, and to put questions on the Order Paper, then I think it is a sad day for Parliament. We hear constantly Conservative Members talk about how they want to move in a non-partisan fashion. What could be more non-partisan than finding out how many tonnes of imported hazardous waste Canada is bringing into the country? This is not of concern to an individual political Party. It is of concern to the whole country. For the Government to suggest that these questions be transferred to resolutions that will be buried, essentially. What it is doing is moving with another throttle on the throat of free speech in Parliament.

I suggest that this particular attempt by the Government should be stopped forthwith and that Your Honour should permit the former Member for Leeds—Grenville to breathe easy in the other place in the knowledge that in fact the one remaining tool we have at our disposal is not being further destroyed by this insatiable Tory Government which seems more intent on slamming down the freedoms of Parliament than in allowing us to explore legitimate avenues of information.

• (1540)

**Mr. Albert Cooper (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, this is an important question. I want to put on the record the attitude of the Government and some of the concerns that we have. First, I want to begin by saying that we do believe that the whole process of tabling questions on the Order Paper is a very important and fundamental part of this institution and an important part of the duties and rights of a Member of Parliament.

Second, I want to say that that right extends not only to opposition Members but it extends as well to Members on the Government side. We are in no way setting this up as a debate between the Government and the Opposition but rather a question of how we handle the questions that are tabled in the House and brought before us to be answered. We do not have any dispute with the process. We like it. We think it is important. We want to enhance it. We want to see it work. It is not our intention in any way to undermine it. But we do want to see that the system is one that works fairly and equitably for all the Members of this institution. We want to see that there is fair use of the resources, the resources