

the House during Question Period about matters which may in one way or another also be under some kind of consideration in committee as long as there is not a direct reference to the committee as such or to discussions which would be identified as those taking place in the committee. When members of the Conservative Party were in opposition, there were many occasions on which questions were asked in the House and accepted by the Speaker which were about matters which were also under discussion in committee.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you not accept the point made by the Hon. Member because at any one time, almost any possible matter that could be raised in the House could well be, and often is, under discussion in one form or another in a standing committee or a legislative committee. I am informed by our Whip that there are over 19 different committees meeting today. If one took the Hon. Member's point of order seriously, it would have the effect of shutting down Question Period. Now, this may be what the Hon. Member wishes. He may fear exposure of the flaws of the Government through the questions from this side of the House. Therefore, he may be raising this point of order in an effort to avoid these questions, arguing that the questions may have something to do with matters that take place in committees. I conclude by saying that the point of order is not valid.

• (1510)

Mr. Speaker: I know that the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) would not wish to impute the motives of any other Hon. Member. Perhaps the Hon. Member could continue.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to impute motives. I am simply trying to point out to you the effect of the Hon. Member's point of order, if it is accepted.

I conclude by saying that the practice of the House, which was accepted by Members who are now on the government side when they were on the opposition side, and which was accepted by yourself, Sir, and your many distinguished predecessors, would cause you to have very sound grounds to reject the Hon. Member's point of order.

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the question that I asked today had to do with the installation of postal boxes, which is part of the plan of Canada Post, and part of its activity. This plan has already been approved by Cabinet. What was referred to the committee, in the words of the Minister, was the postal rate package. When we questioned the President of Canada Post beyond that, he simply refused to give additional information.

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I was rising at the time the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper) rose. I was intending to respond to the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) when he put forward his thesis that it has long been understood, and then went on to say that the House could ask questions on those same subjects

Point of Order—Mr. Cooper

that were before committee. The fact is that is the tradition, and it should be recognized that it has long been understood. It also ought to be recognized that the McGrath report, and its adaptation, is very recently before us. It was accepted by Parliament as recently as this past year. It does set forward new sets of priorities and powers for private Members in the House of Commons.

If that type of responsibility for private Members is to be as the McGrath committee recommended, then clearly there needs to be a position within that committee under the new structure of what a standing committee ought to be—a group that can investigate matters without referral from the Minister, and that does not require any obligations of the Minister for the matters which it studies—and obviously the point of order that was put forward by the Hon. Member for Peace River (Mr. Cooper) ought to be taken seriously and not be reflected back on precedents in the period prior to the introduction of the McGrath committee report.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the point must be made that since this House has adopted new rules, the Government majority could indeed shut down Question Period by sustaining the argument that the committees are more important than the House. That would not stand up to scrutiny.

I wish to make the point that since the rule changes, there have been situations where a few Members of Parliament could call any matter before a committee, because that was essentially what we did when we changed the rules. We allowed committees more flexibility to call several questions before them thereby making it very difficult for the Official Opposition, or for the other opposition to ask questions, because the Government could always invoke that the matter is to be studied by a committee, or is being studied by a committee.

I submit first that it is not for the committees to supersede the authority of the House. They are subsidiaries of the House and, therefore, by extension subject to the House. Second, I do not think that since Beauchesne's was written, and since we have amended our rules, that it would be proper for any group of Members, or any Member of the opposition, or the government side to entertain the argument that because a subject matter is before a committee there could be no questions about it during Question Period. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that you will rule that this spurious point of order has absolutely no value; and that indeed the prime objective of Question Period is to direct questions to the Ministry to elicit information that is supposed to be forthcoming and is of some urgency.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. It is obvious that under the new Standing Orders that committees can investigate anything they wish at any given time. As Members of the House of Commons, we must retain the ability to raise questions that are in the public domain. Obviously, the questions raised by both the Liberal