

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 31, 1963

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

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### MR. SPEAKER—STATEMENT RESPECTING QUESTIONS ON ORDERS OF THE DAY

**Mr. Speaker:** May I ask the indulgence of the house in order to make a statement on a matter of urgent, general interest to the house.

It is now slightly more than five months since I was given the great honour by all hon. members of assuming the position of presiding officer in the Canadian House of Commons. When I undertook to be your servant I said that "it will be my duty to preserve the precious heritage of this historic chamber, to maintain decorum and order in debate and above all to exercise fairness and impartiality in protecting the rights of every individual member."

As might have been foreseen, the Chair has had its difficulties in attempting to carry out this effort, not because of any undue lack of co-operation by hon. members but because of the very nature of those self assigned functions in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

There is one area of the work of the house which has caused me grave concern; it is that of oral questions on orders of the day. For that reason, as well as others, I listened with satisfaction to the debate last week leading to the establishment of a committee on procedure and reform with the wholehearted support of all groups in this house.

That committee will meet shortly and will, I have no doubt, conduct its deliberations with the single purpose in mind of improving the techniques and rules of our internal administration, so as to render the best possible service to parliament and to the country. It goes without saying, however, that while deliberations may be conducted and representations may be received, some time will elapse before any proposals can be made to the house from the committee.

The problem of the question period before the orders of the day is not a new one, and it has disturbed previous occupants of the chair as well as many members of the house, not only in the present parliament but in those which have gone before. As long ago as 1956 the then Speaker of the House of Commons was sufficiently concerned, to give a learned

and valuable discourse on the rules to be followed on asking questions before the orders of the day. For those hon. members who are interested, as I think we should all be, I can do no better than refer to Mr. Speaker Beaudoin's observations as they are cited at page 2206 in the debates of the House of Commons of 1956.

I wish to state that having read Mr. Speaker Beaudoin's remarks on that occasion I am in complete agreement with them, both in substance and in form, and during the course of my own treatment of the problem I intend to incorporate some of the basic suggestions made by Mr. Speaker Beaudoin into my own remarks.

Mr. Beaudoin was followed in the chair by Hon. Roland Michener, who left behind him a reputation of impartiality and wisdom which has been a source of strength not only to me but I am sure to my hon. friend from Edmonton West, and I am equally sure, to Speakers who will follow us both.

For further study of the subject I can do no better than to refer hon. members to Mr. Speaker Michener's suggestions as found on page 1393 of the debates of the House of Commons of February 26, 1959.

Finally, as the most recent authority, if any were needed, I would direct the attention of hon. members to the very comprehensive statement on the matter by my predecessor, Mr. Speaker Lambert, the present member of this house for Edmonton West.

May I take the liberty of offering a synopsis of the principles stated on these occasions by these most learned and distinguished Speakers. They are as follows:

1. The form of questions is governed by the terms of standing order 39, section 1, providing in part that in putting a question no argument or opinion is to be offered nor any facts stated, except so far as might be necessary to explain the question. (Mr. Speaker Lambert, page 565, October 16, 1962.)

2. Questions should be offered only in connection with urgent and important matters of public concern when, because of immediacy, the regular procedure relating to questions cannot be utilized. (Mr. Speaker Lambert, page 565, October 16, 1962.)

3. An explanation can be sought regarding the intention of the government, but not an explanation of opinion upon matters of policy.