

*Oral Questions*

to present the problems of his individual riding and perhaps other parts of the country as well.

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I sympathize with the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan). Certainly, a number of backbenchers wish to ask important questions, and they would like more time in which to ask them. I wish to make a point which is sometimes heard in the house but does not seem to receive too much attention, namely, that government members also would like to ask questions but they do not seem to have the opportunity in the question period to do so.

**An hon. Member:** Raise that in caucus.

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** I understand that the attitude of some hon. members is that as we, on this side, are supporters of the government, we should be in accord with everything the government does. That is not the point. Some of us may question policies being carried out by the cabinet and we, as backbenchers, want to know about these things.

**An hon. Member:** Ask in caucus.

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** Therefore, we have the right, as Members of Parliament and as supporters of the government to ask such questions in the House.

There is another point which is not well understood. In addition to the several opposition parties in the House, we must face an even stronger opposition, that of the fourth estate, which is powerful in this country. The backbenchers of the Liberal party have just as much right to the forum provided by this House for the purposes of asking questions and seeing their views expressed in the press as the other backbenchers of other parties.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** It seems to me that the present practice should be changed so that backbenchers on the government side may have an opportunity to put forth their views in the same proportion as members on the other side of the House. I welcome what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) said, namely, that he will speak to his people, if the House leader on my side of the House will speak to the people on this side. Certainly, a number of questions asked in this House are not necessarily questions of national interest. Of course, we are all political beings; we all want to be given publicity in our ridings. At the same time, a question about a bridge over a little river in a certain riding is not a question of national importance. Many such questions are asked in this House during the question period. I suggest that if hon. members bear in mind that we are concerned about national matters in this House, we could perhaps solve part of our difficulty.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** Mr. Speaker, as you know, for the third time in about a week a point of order has been raised at the end of the question period to do with the question period. This indicates not only that many

[Mr. Peters.]

hon. members have not had a chance to ask questions but the magnitude of the problem as well. I will not repeat what has been said, although I should like to add this: When the 40-minute limitation was established in the previous parliament, that parliament was constituted differently from the present one. Although we tried to devise rules that would find application in more than one parliament, to a certain degree the rules that we introduced in the previous parliament were surrounded by considerable controversy. Those rules reflected the fact that there were more than 150 members on the government side and slightly more than 100 in opposition. Today, the reverse is true. There are a few more than 100 on the government side and more than 150 in opposition. If individual members are to be allowed to ask their questions, the rules governing the question period in this parliament will need to be reconsidered. Under a simple rule of thumb we might extend the question period by 50 per cent, in recognition of the number of members who now sit on opposition benches.

Another practical suggestion is this: Perhaps the government House leader, in view of comments which reflect frustrations, might convene the standing committee on procedure, perhaps by unanimous consent. The government House leader could present a motion, either later today or tomorrow, so that this committee could immediately attend to this important question. I think that is important, in view of the nature of this parliament, and this question should not be allowed to drag on for weeks. I urge the government House leader to bring forward a straightforward motion so that the standing committee on procedure could convene early next week, say, consider this problem and present an interim report as to what action can be taken on this question.

I realize that in dealing with a question originally raised by the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate we are dealing with a matter that goes beyond Your Honour's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, I think it is important for us to hear an expression of Your Honour's views so that the members of the House, through the instrumentality of this committee, may resolve this difficult question.

• (1550)

**Mr. Korchinski:** Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on a few items that have not been mentioned during the course of this discussion. There may be a sense of urgency on the part of many members in this minority situation. Under normal circumstances, the pressure on each individual member may not be as great, that is if we were to assume that parliament would be here for four or five years. In that situation, members can expect to be recognized. There is not such a sense of urgency.

Another point is that which I raised yesterday in connection with questions being asked and notice being taken of them. Perhaps there could be an allocation of a few minutes time, either before or after the question period, at which time only those questions of which notice has been taken could be answered. In that way a member who has been jumping up and down like a yoyo for two weeks will not have to repeat his question. It is incumbent upon a minister to meet a commitment which he makes to this House and the country. It is not only the members of the press who read *Hansard*. It is read by people all across