

never oppose that. However, from time immemorial Question Period has been reserved for the Opposition in the tradition of the British parliamentary system, which I defend on every occasion because it is one of the great heritages which I as a Canadian have received from the British Parliament. Therefore, by tradition the Opposition must really be able to question the Government. However, during debate the Chair always recognizes many more Members of the Government. Therefore, we have equilibrium. During the first 15 minutes there is a good distribution. I have made the survey myself and I know the Government is favoured in the first 15 minutes. We never oppose that because it makes sense. The Conservatives are more in number. That is what Canadians democratically decided in the last election. Therefore, the Conservatives are given more.

However, Question Period, and I admit it gets more limelight on television, is only part of our deliberations. It is the same in Parliamentary Committee. The chairman distributes the questions according to the proportions of Members. We have the first round of questions between the three Parties and after that more time is given to the Opposition.

With all due respect, I feel Hon. Members will have to go back to the traditions of this House. They are not badly served because the Government side does ask some questions. As my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), said, perhaps the Government Members should get together and put questions which are really of great importance, and not just questions here and there of which Ministers are always aware. I do recognize that at times a Conservative Member has a very important question which he or she would like to raise where pre-notice will not be given to the Minister. If Hon. Members would think back to 1984, they will realize that many of the questions put by Members of the Government were questions of which the Minister was aware, were not that important and could have been asked in the lobby, but it is good public politics, and I do not disagree with that, because we are all in politics.

I do not believe my colleague has a very strong point. When we arrive at the Question Period, which is our only opportunity to question the Government, we must abide by the British parliamentary system whereby the Opposition in the House of Commons can ask direct questions. In that respect the British Parliamentary system is much more superior than the Congressional system in the United States.

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to hold up the Minister of State for Privatization (Mrs. McDougall). I understand he is about to make an important announcement in the Chamber about a major change in Government policy. I do not know what it is, but I am very interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

I am almost inclined to agree with the Hon. Member who brought up the question concerning Question Period, because I am confident the Liberals are going to be on the Government side of the House very shortly and perhaps we might be

making the same arguments. However, I have to slightly differ with the previous speaker. I agree with him that we follow the British tradition in this House. In London, as you know, Mr. Speaker, questions go back and forth to the Government side, to the Opposition side, to the Government side and back to the Opposition side.

However, we cannot transplant one aspect of the present British system into our system. We would have to transplant the entire system which would mean that Members of the Government would be able to rise and really attack their Cabinet Ministers. More importantly, the committee system would have to be changed in such a way as to give Members of the Government side total authority to originate their own terms of reference and to delve into whatever they want. The focus of attention in the British House is not in Question Period at all. No one knows it is even taking place. It is in the committees. Therefore, we cannot transplant one aspect of the British system into our system. This is the only thing we have left in our system to make the Government at least partially accountable to the people of Canada for its actions. If we take that opportunity away or dilute it, then we destroy our system.

My only reason for rising is to point out that I am afraid that we are going to be on the other side very shortly and we might be making the same arguments.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to repeat the representations of other Hon. Members. They have been excellent. However, I want to add two or three points. *Beauchesne's Fifth Edition, Citation 55* states:

The privilege of freedom of speech is—the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee.

I want to remind the Hon. Member that if in fact his privileges have been breached, it would mean that he has been denied the right to speak, the right to ask a question. I submit that that is not the case. He has had, in my recollection, a number of opportunities to raise points on the floor of the House of Commons during Question Period and, as a result of recent reforms, throughout the entire day. We now have an opportunity during debate to ask questions, through the question or statement procedure, so that Hon. Members of the Government, who I might add are the overwhelming numbers when it comes to delivering speeches in the House of Commons—a reflection of the percentages of the three political Parties—can ask questions or make statements. Not only do Members of the Government have ample opportunity to raise points and ask questions of the appropriate Minister, at the end of each speech there is an opportunity to ask questions or make statements, to say nothing of the fact that in committee the overwhelming numbers are from the Government side, where again there is ample opportunity to ask questions of Ministers or representatives from the Ministers' office.

● (1220)

The only point the Hon. Member could make in terms of a breach of privilege is if he had been denied, presumably by the