

the build-up of negative attitudes in this country, and we cannot afford that.

Mr. Speaker, I have the greatest respect for the way you handle the question period. I do not think anybody in the House could exercise more wisdom, more patience or more fairness, but I suggest that if the question period is to be meaningful, action should be taken in the next few days, even if that requires a reference from parliament, to alleviate the problem by extending the period twice or three times a week.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Howie: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order—

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I hope that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for St. Boniface has the floor on a point of order and is entitled to be recognized.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I hope you will give me half the length of time the previous speaker had. I, too am not happy with the use of Standing Orders 43 and 26 by the opposition. There was a good example of that today. Many members used those Standing Orders today, knowing full well that they really did not have a particular point to bring to your attention. They make use of these rules every day, and lately we have been losing about 40 minutes on these motions before we even start the question period.

I should like to agree with the hon. member for Gander-Twilligate (Mr. Lundrigan) that the question period should be made longer. However, I feel that if the members of the various parties used the question period to bring only pertinent matters before the House, better use could be made of that time for further important matters, to the benefit of all Canadians. Mr. Speaker, I think this is a matter for co-operation. Perhaps the House leaders could speak to the members of their own parties in an effort to make sure that the time of the House is not taken up with irrelevant motions made under Standing Order 43 or Standing Order 26, which often waste an hour before the question period starts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, for some time I have been wanting to speak on the same subject on a point of order. However, I would disagree with the hon. member who raised this point of order.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the oral question period has become a mockery and has been abused. It will be said that members from the back benches cannot ask questions; I would remind them that members of the Social Credit party, which is an integral part of this House, have asked two questions today and this for the simple reason that the official opposition does ask too many supplementaries. If the members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition would understand how important it is for them and for others to give a chance to other members to ask a question, I do not doubt, knowing the tact, finesse and competence of the Chair, that all hon. members want-

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ing to ask a question would be able to do so in their turn. But as long as the official opposition will abuse by raising five, six, eight or ten supplementaries from the beginning of the question period, which delays the first question of the New Democratic party leader for 15 minutes and that of the Social Credit party leader for 15 minutes more, finally some day the question period will be over and members from the back benches from both sides of the House will have no time left to ask their questions.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that we are supporting you and that we disagree with the critics of the hon. member and we urge you to see that those people refrain from abusing the question period by asking supplementaries so as to grant the same privilege to hon. members from the other parties.

[*English*]

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, although I do not support any suggestion that the Official Opposition is utilizing a disproportionate amount of the question period, I should like to make a suggestion to the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay): If he will speak to his group, I will consult with mine, to see if we can make any constructive suggestion to Your Honour that might be helpful.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, may I add this: I think there is general agreement that the question period has been badly abused. One can blame the leadership of the various parties and the neglect of party leaders with respect to the individual problems of backbenchers. I suggest that the House leaders be asked to meet with the procedure committee in order that we may change the rules governing the question period. The problem, which Your Honour cannot cope with because of existing circumstances, arises from the fact that the first question leads to a mini-debate, followed possibly by 10 or 12 supplementary questions. Then, another question is asked, which also turns into a mini-debate as several other supplementaries are asked.

The backbenchers in all parts of the House really do not participate, except by bottlegging related questions in the question period, or questions on other topics. If we are to avoid calamity in the question period I strongly urge Your Honour, as a member of that procedure committee, to bring the House leaders together for the purpose of revising the rules. Unless our rules are changed, the question period will become a shambles. All members in this minority parliament ought to be equal.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: There should be, at least, partial equality of opportunity to ask questions, and there is not. But for Your Honour's kindness and guidance, many members could not ask any questions. This holds true for those members who are classed as independent as well for all those who sit in the back rows of this chamber. Perhaps Your Honour could use your good offices in such a way that we could split the question period into a leaders' hour which would be followed by a question period for backbenchers. The leaders' hour could be devoted to questions asked by members of the front benches and to supplementaries, and the rest of the question period should be so arranged as to allow an individual member