

Point of Order—Mr. MacEachen

have, and being a private member on this side is a lot more difficult than being one on the other side. The points I want to make have to deal with that factor.

The first factor is that I have noticed in the last five or six years—but particularly since television has come to the House—the desire, the greed even, of the parties to organize the time to their best advantage. On the basis of that, those of us in all parties who sit on the back benches have lost the rights, the privileges and the time that we used to have in the House. It used to be at one time that during the question period the parties would take up a little bit of the time, perhaps the first 15 or 20 minutes, but I notice that the time the parties are trying to grab now is slowly extending. I am certain that parties have a legitimate function to play in our political system, but it seems to me that we have to look at isolating some of the time that is available to members of parliament in the question period and in the debates of the House for private members on both sides of the House. I find it very difficult to accept the pious remarks on behalf of the private member which are made by certain frontbenchers on the side who have been the plotters and the schemers and who have been largely successful in removing that power away from the private members.

The second point I want to make about the private member is that, while we have more opportunity in the House of Commons to raise grievances and concerns for our constituencies, in theory and in point of fact the parties have again taken over. For example, I look at the utilization of time by the parties in terms of the supply day motions. We used to be able to get some time for grievances when the supply motion was debated on the floor of the House of Commons—not much but some time. Now we get almost none. Maybe members on the other side should present some general motions and just allow the backbenchers some free form operations once in a while to make certain we have a more ample opportunity to express the concerns of our constituents.

My last point concerning the private member has to do with the question period. I mentioned that Standing Order 43 to a large extent has become an adjunct of the question period. It seems to me that those of us who sit on the back benches on this side will want to have more of the fair share of the time that is available to backbenchers in general. I know that since you have been in the chair, sir, more backbenchers on this side have been recognized on motions under Standing Order 43 and on questions. We think that is an appropriate way to go about it. But we think also that government backbenchers—irrespective of which party forms the government—should have a more legitimate right to the question period. My information is that in Great Britain questions are alternated between the opposition and the government, and the same applies in the parliament of Australia, and nobody has been able to convince me that democracy there is in worse shape than it is in Canada. It seems to me that the government belongs to everybody and we want our fair crack at it too.

Mr. Speaker: I indicated on two earlier occasions this evening, I think, that the discussion should end here. I did

[Mr. Reid.]

want to extend recognition this evening to members who, throughout this debate, have been trying to get the floor. But now I think we have had ample discussion on this subject. Let me say that I want to thank those who contributed this evening for being very much to the point, very concise and very brief, in addition to being very helpful. Of course, the Chair never knows when it is going to get the best help and from what source. I have had contributions made tonight which have indicated on one hand, for example, that we should co-operate in minimizing the misuse of Standing Order 43 in order to strengthen respect for the rule, and on the other hand I have had suggestions and attitudes which have expressed points of view different from what I might have expected in respect of the use of this rule.

It is a very useful rule, one that we use very frequently and one that is an important part of our procedures. However, two or three times this evening I have heard re-emphasized the importance of a grievance procedure of some sort. The absence of that direct confrontation in a grievance procedure has been considered, I think, throughout the long debate this afternoon in the consideration of this rule which I think is so important.

The almost total absence of that grievance procedure is one of the difficulties we face in attempting to use this rule to do something which it was not intended to do but for which nevertheless there is no other convenient vehicle. Therefore, the suggestion that we should respect the rule a little more and perhaps tighten its application, but maintain very carefully the right of members of the House to take advantage of it on a consistent basis, is an observation that is certainly not lost on the Chair.

I wanted to attempt something that all hon. members agree was overdue, and that was, first of all, a very full and complete discussion on this important Standing Order. The second thing that is overdue is, after the discussion, a review by the Chair to pull together some of the salient points that have been made in the discussion of this rule. I will attempt to set them out with the greatest clarity possible.

● (2122)

I do not know if I can achieve it, but within a few days I should be able to respond to this very excellent and thorough discussion by attempting to bring forward a catalogue of the considerations we should have in mind in the use of this rule. We will see what ones we can usefully improve just simply for our own handling of the rule, and what ones might have to be improved in some other way. It is an undertaking which I am glad to embark upon. I only hope that it will finish with some quality. We all need to understand this rule a little better and perhaps apply it a little more with the intention for which it was originally framed. I will attempt to do that. In the meantime, this brings us in our proceedings to orders of the day.