

Point of Order—Mr. W. Baker

statement on motions if it were necessary for it to be given in the House.

If there is to be this kind of abuse from that minister, of all people, and if we are to continue to hear "Order" shouted at us from the other side when we seek information in questions, it is understandable and natural that there should be reciprocation in kind. I hope it does not deteriorate to that. I underline the point made by my House leader, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), and by the House leader for the New Democratic Party that it is far better both for the House, and for the country which watches our debates, if we shorten our questions and our answers. But I have to say that, given the nature of this chamber where we face each other two sword-lengths apart, if members over there shout "Order" at us we will respond in kind; we will shout "Order" back. If they refuse to answer questions or if they abuse the question period, you can expect that we will respond in kind. That would be only natural and if we were to do anything else we would be failing in our responsibility as an opposition to keep the government in check.

Mr. Peter Lang (Kitchener): Madam Speaker, I would point out to the House leader for the official opposition that I am fully capable of making up my own questions. I do not accept his accusation of abusing the rules of this House. I will ask him to try them on to see whether they fit for him or for his party. I would also point out that it is not the hon. gentleman's position to judge whether a question is appropriate or not, or whether it is too long or not. That is for Madam Speaker to decide and I believe she is doing a fine job of carrying out that responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: I should also like to reply to the accusation that I made a speech when asking this question. My question was three and a half lines long and contained 40 words. I would hardly regard that as a speech.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): We did not say that. It was the minister who made a speech.

Mr. Crosbie: We know you cannot make a speech!

Mr. Lang: I think that is all I have to say on the subject. That is all it merits.

[*Translation*]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I would not have risen in this debate had the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) not mentioned my name. I want to tell him that the Secretary of State, who had to leave for an important engagement, would have liked to stay. He asked me to replace him in the House for this period of time because he had a very important appointment.

But what surprises me most, Madam Speaker, is that the hon. member for Calgary Centre who did get caught in the

act, today behaved like a child who gets caught and fights back saying that it is not his fault, it is because others are doing the same thing that he is doing it himself. I do not find that attitude to be very serious or very parliamentary. It is obvious the hon. member for Calgary Centre abused what is called the minimum decorum to be kept in this House. If unfortunately, on certain occasions, other members do the same thing, that does not justify at all the behaviour of the hon. member for Calgary Centre today.

● (1220)

[*English*]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, I do not intend to make a lengthy contribution to this discussion unless I am goaded. We all realize that government backbenchers have the right to ask questions and that the Speaker controls that so that it is not too often and does not interfere too much with the opposition's primary responsibility in the question period. We also realize that government members presumably usually check with the minister so that the minister knows he is going to be asked a question on a certain subject and will not appear like a dumb-dumb or a dingbat when he is asked a question by somebody on his own side. The hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Lang) did not deny the proposition that he had informed the minister that he was going to ask that particular question.

Mr. Corbin: You guys do it all the time.

Mr. Crosbie: There is nothing wrong with that. I am not saying there is anything wrong about that, but the minister then abused the question period by trying to make a five or six minute speech in reply to a tame, pussycat question from his own member. That is an abuse of the question period.

Mr. Lang: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Crosbie: I am already up on a point of order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I have already heard the hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Lang). I know what his arguments are, and I think at this point I would like to cut off the discussion and make a few remarks for the benefit of the House.

Hon. members realize, of course, that whether questions are planted or not is not for me to judge. My view is that all questions are legitimate unless they require very lengthy statistics. In that case I would say they should be put on the order paper. In my view, all questions are legitimate whether they come from one side of the House or the other. I will make a passing remark about the question of the hon. member for Kitchener: it was short.

I think the answer was the matter which was put mostly into question by some hon. members. Some answers might be longer than others, and it is not for me to judge whether a question is properly answered with a "yes" or a "no".

In the particular case this morning I was trying to listen to the answer the minister was giving to the question of the hon.