

Oral Questions

Economic Expansion should not have been allowed to answer the question. It should have been answered by the Prime Minister. However, when the minister rose you permitted him to answer. You offered no objection. If you made any error, that is where you made it.

Let me move on and say that although at that time I thought of raising a point of order, when the Prime Minister got up to answer the supplementary question, that seemed to take care of the situation. My reason for reciting this is to suggest that any errors you might have made during the question period went both ways and that there were members on this side of the House who were given the benefit of the doubt as well as those on the government side.

I come to the point that is really before us, and I come to it by making a direct personal appeal to my friend, the hon. member for Egmont. If necessary, I make it on the basis of something that is common to the past of both of us. He knows what I mean by that. I suspect that he realizes some of the words he used were a bit intemperate, particularly when he said that Your Honour was protecting or shielding the government. Sir, I do not think any member of this House should say that. I do not know what it was he said later when you were answering the hon. member for Crowfoot. Apparently he interjected something Your Honour did not like. However, I did hear the words in which he charged that Your Honour was protecting or shielding the government. I am sure that on reflection the hon. member for Egmont would not want that statement to stay without his apologizing for it and withdrawing it.

● (1520)

Sir, there is something to be said for the point made by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton, that if a final judgment has to be made, it might be made later this day or tomorrow. But I would hope that the necessity for this will be obviated by my good friend doing the straightforward and gentlemanly thing by expressing his regret for the words he used which were an offence to the Chair. If he does that, then we can get on to the business of the day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: On this point of order, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Social Credit Party I would like to make it clear that, as far as I know, our party is not known to have taken advantage of the oral questions period in the past. We are therefore in a position to make some remarks on this issue. The oral questions period, as hon. members should understand, is a period allocated to questions and, as we all know through experience, certainly not an answer period, judging by the answers made by the ministers.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders are very clear about this oral questions period; there are some rules which cannot be avoided, but experience shows that these rules are being abused when it comes to the type of questions asked and answers given.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

We should certainly learn something from these conditions. Perhaps we should amend the rules on the question period so as to make the task easier for the Speaker when he has to decide if a question is out of order. Anyway, I do not want to decide on behalf of my party whether the remarks of the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) are acceptable or not but I think that, for the well being of this democratic institution, our group will certainly support the ruling of the Speaker.

[*English*]

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, as acting House leader—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blais:—in the absence of the House leader I intended to make my representations in view of the fact the House leader was not here at the time the exchange took place.

As the hon. member for Egmont knows, in this instance there would have to be a motion presented by the House leader relating to the suspension of the hon. member. That would have to take place because, as has been pointed out by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton, the Speaker of the House is a member of the House who has been enthroned as a result of the choice of other hon. members who sit in this chamber. Since there is no longer any provision for appeal from the Speaker's ruling, there is an added obligation on all members to support the Chair.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blais: We have been very fortunate. I have had the honour of serving in this House since 1972.

An hon. Member: A newcomer.

Mr. Blais: I have served under two ideal Speakers. The Speaker we have now not only comes from my area—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Blais:—but he has discharged his responsibility—

Mr. Speaker: Order. These personal observations are not going to make this any easier. There is only one question at issue now. I have attempted to put the matter as clearly as I can. There is every reason, on a daily basis, for members on both sides of the House, more often, certainly, on my left than on my right because of the obvious nature of a parliament, to be disgruntled about positions which have to be taken by the Chair. That is to be expected and, I think, to be expressed.

There are tremendous pressures operating on members within the sphere in which we work in this chamber, and it is not always expected that these disagreements are to be expressed in the most temperate language. However, there is outstanding an observation that there is a motivation, or was a motivation, behind the rather difficult decision the Chair had to make. That is the only issue at stake. I do not think, really, out of respect for the dignity of the Chair, I can let that observation remain on the record. I really feel, out of respect for the position of the Chair, that I must insist that the