

Often, when a question is rather complicated, opposition members think, very appropriately, of giving notice of the question so as to get a full and detailed answer, because there are still some members in this House, Madam Speaker, who really want complete information and answers instead of trying to score political points and create an impression. And I cannot accept nor understand the remark made by my hon. colleague to the effect that it is most unusual that a member, from either side of the House, should give a minister prior notice of a question he intends to ask.

On the contrary, I think that this shows intelligence and respect not only for this institution, but also for the minister. I am not saying that this should be done in every case. This is not what I am suggesting. What I do suggest, however, is that it is not normal to complain, that this happens occasionally, regardless of what actually occurred in this instance, which I do not know.

The point which I want to emphasize, Madam Speaker, is that nothing whatever ought to be considered out of order with respect to the attitude evidenced by the hon. member for Kitchener when he addressed his question to the minister. Moreover, there was nothing irregular as far as the answer provided by the Secretary of State is concerned. The only irregularity arose from the fact that because of the obstinate and continued catcalls at that very moment, it was just about impossible for a minister to provide a normal reply which could at least be heard, and that is what I find unacceptable.

If anything is to be retained from the contribution made by the House leader of the official opposition, it should be that those who are asked questions should at least be given a chance to reply and be heard. I was sitting next to the Secretary of State and I could hardly hear him because of the catcalls from the other side. In particular, the hon. member for Calgary Centre, was stridently objecting to the length of the reply given by the Secretary of State.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, on the matter of principle, and regardless of what happened today, I agree with the House leader of the official opposition that opposition members should make their questions much shorter. I also agree that, on this side of the House, unless the subject is really tricky or calls for more explanations, we should try, as you yourself have suggested on a few occasions since the beginning of this session, to give replies which are shorter or more *ad rem*, to use a legal expression. However, I would not want to see a most legitimate complaint used as an opportunity to criticize the attitude evidenced this morning either by the hon. member for Kitchener or by the Secretary of State, who made outstanding efforts in order to be heard amidst the noise and shouts coming from the Progressive Conservative benches.

*Point of Order—Mr. W. Baker*

● (1210)

[English]

**Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Madam Speaker, it is not my intention to add to the length of the discussion about the question and answer which have been alluded to. However, I should like to say that underlying the discussion we are now having is to be found the basic cause of the difficulty now affecting our question period. I feel my colleagues are right in expecting that members of our party should get in four or five questions a day. Most days, we get only three. It is not your fault, Madam Speaker. Your arithmetic is dead on; we get the right proportion. The reason we do not get the four or five we think we should get is that not very many questions are asked during the question period, and this is because the preambles to many of the questions are too long and the answers are far too long. It is not only the case of the reply given by the Secretary of State (Mr. Fox) this morning. I think Your Honour will find, if you check *Hansard* tomorrow, that the Secretary of State spent more time while he was on his feet telling us what the Tories had not done than in answering the question about what were the Liberals going to do. I do not think that is a correct use of the time.

We had no objection in our corner of the House, Madam Speaker, when you remonstrated with one of our members a few days ago on the ground that the preamble to his question was too long. I join with the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) in saying that you have our support if you try to cut down the length of preambles and the length of answers so that more members not only in our party but in all parties can get a chance to ask their questions in the question period.

**Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre):** In view of the fact that the government House leader has brought my name into the discussion, Madam Speaker, I should like to make one or two observations. First, I observe that the Secretary of State (Mr. Fox), who triggered this discussion has not had the courtesy to stay here and listen to it.

The government House leader directed his criticisms at me. He is correct in saying members should not shout. My comment is that I was emulating his colleagues, including the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) and innumerable other members of the government party, who frequently and consistently since this session started have resorted to shouting "Order" across the chamber whenever they are dissatisfied with the nature of a question, apparently with some success.

Today there was a clear abuse. Obviously, the Secretary of State had made some adjustment in the programs respecting student loans and, quite obviously, he wanted to make those public. So he had his backbencher from Kitchener (Mr. Lang) put the question and this gave him the opportunity to make a speech in the House in the guise of answering the question, outlining the things he had done which, in his view, were so much superior to what had been done by this party. The answer given by the Secretary of State today should most properly have been made either by press release or by way of a