

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 4, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

**Mr. Speaker:** Before proceeding to Tabling of Documents, I gather that the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) wishes to raise a point of order.

## POINT OF ORDER

### QUESTION PERIOD—LENGTH OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, yes, I do. It is a point of order which flows from yesterday's Question Period. As the Chair well knows events of yesterday made it impossible for me to raise this point immediately at the end of the Question Period. This is the earliest opportunity I have had to do so.

As Your Honour knows, there is an opportunity provided under the Standing Orders of the House of Commons for Members of Parliament and Ministers to make statements on matters they consider to be important. As a result of a recent statement by Your Honour regarding the Question Period, Members are now being restricted in their preambles to their initial question, as the Speaker has quite rightly said, to one carefully drawn sentence.

I want to raise with Your Honour the necessity to require of Ministers that they not abuse the opportunities which are afforded them in answering, as they see fit, since ordinary Members in asking questions are not permitted to put into the preamble of their questions any statement which relates to that which might be reported in newspapers, in other words, in a verbatim sense, to stand up and read into the record testimonials or questions raised through the media which appear in the press. Equally, it should be inappropriate for Ministers to rise during Questions Period and begin to read into the record selective pieces of propaganda.

Therefore, in the spirit of the new rules, given that Members are now being severely restricted, and justifiably so, in the way in which they preface their questions with a preamble, I ask the Chair to consider asking Ministers of the Crown to desist from referring extensively, verbatim, to documents other than those which relate directly to the question being asked.

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, I simply wish to make a brief contribution to the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans). The matter is one with respect to the length of questions and answers. I have no problem with that. Brevity in questions and answers serves the House well.

However, I draw the line if there is any suggestion—and I do not want to presume something if it is not intended—that

somehow the quality of the question or answer is a matter for the Chair's consideration. I think Your Honour has addressed yourself with respect to that matter.

**Mr. Deans:** There is no quality in any of the answers.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** If an Hon. Member raises a matter in the course of a preamble it is often the case that a particular contention in the preamble has to be addressed in the answer. Therefore, I suggest that the matter of the length of the intervention is something to which Your Honour can give consideration, and I am sure you are doing that.

I subscribe to the statements Your Honour made a week ago yesterday. I think all Members of the House are in support of the rules which you have set down. If the Hon. Member is raising a question with respect to the length of questions and answers, then I support him.

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly join in the discussion in order to tell the Chair that, indeed, we are all very pleased with the number of questions we are getting in. I cannot say that we are always pleased with the quality of the answers we receive. I think the point made by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) is well taken. When a Minister quotes from the *Bible*, for example, be it the bible he calls *The Toronto Star* or otherwise, I think he is well advised to use those statements carefully because we can do the same thing on this side. We can quote from all types of papers that condemn—

**Mr. Deans:** We would not be allowed to do that.

**Mr. Gauthier:** We are not allowed to quote, as the Hon. Member says. We are not allowed to do that so why would the Minister be allowed to do it?

**Mr. Speaker:** Oh, this job is fun.

I appreciate the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain and the interventions which Hon. Members have made. I think I should say this. The key issue has been, and will continue to be, length.

I must say to Ministers that in the context of length it is difficult to imagine that an answer which involves the reading of a long statement from a newspaper is as short an answer as is possible. Perhaps it will be understood by Ministers if I put it that way and they will pursue the course of action which they and the whole House believes is appropriate with regard to length thereby.