

● (1510)

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I would very much like to know the reasons why the initial exchange with the Prime Minister was terminated abruptly without explanation. As I understand it, you were simply saying that you made a decision that that was enough of that kind of question. I find it incredible given the importance of the question, for a refusal—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have never had the experience of coming to the point of naming a member. I have often wondered as to the circumstances under which that practice would be necessary. I sincerely hope, and continue to hope, that it will never be necessary during the time that I occupy this chair. However, I have to indicate that whether hon. members agree or disagree, obviously there is always disagreement about difficult decisions taken by the Chair.

The discretion to be exercised by the Chair is always a difficult one. It has to be exercised on the spur of the moment. When it has not been satisfactory, I have always been prepared to listen to objective argument as to whether or not it was correct. However, I am not prepared to suffer observations that the discretion which the Chair has exercised has been based on some principles that are not only questionable but, indeed, unsavoury. I am not prepared to suffer that imputation now by the hon. member for Egmont. If he is not prepared to withdraw that remark and apologize, I shall have to name him.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, if I may rise on this matter for a few moments, I have some responsibilities with respect to this House of Commons. I hope members on all sides of the House understand that. I understand the difficulties of the Chair.

Mr. Nowlan: What did you say? Say it louder. Have the guts to say it in your chair. You have not got the guts. No wonder you lost in Quebec. You don't deserve anything. Get on your feet. You have not got the guts to say it on your feet. You have not got the brains, either.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I understand the difficulty that you, as Speaker, have with regard to making judgments. I hope that there is a corresponding of the difficulty, and I say this with great respect, for those of us who are sitting in these benches; and you come from these benches, sir, in terms of matters that happen on the floor of the House of Commons.

This may well have been the most intemperate or difficult question period for Your Honour. I want to respectfully suggest to you that the difficulties, in terms of the question period, do not all come from this side of the House. I am sure that while Your Honour must make instant judgments with

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respect to questions, you are not claiming infallibility. We do not claim infallibility with regard to advancing questions, and ministers do not claim infallibility when answering them.

I hope there is not the same necessity for an instant judgment with respect to the decision of naming a member of parliament—because that happens to be a very serious matter. I hope that in the course of this you will not exercise any judgment which you feel you may have to exercise immediately, but will wait until you have examined the record of the proceedings of this day.

In the course of the responsibilities with respect to my membership in this House of Commons, I have had responsibility for the question period. I want to say, and I mean no disrespect to you, sir, or to members of this House, that while we labour mightily, some perhaps may say foolishly, to put forward a question in the question period that is meaningful in the parliamentary sense, and we can do nothing less than put whatever we have into it, however adequate or inadequate it may appear to be, this government in particular has relied to a greater and greater extent on the fact that they do not have to answer—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): —and this raises a problem in this House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): If I may say so, I do not believe the people who never have to ask questions are the best judges of that, as they are trying to be. That is why I say that there are legitimate frustrations that develop in the course of life in this place day by day which, I am sorry to say, some of my friends on the other side cannot understand.

It is for that reason, the reason for the build-up of tension in this place as a result of what I have tried to describe to Your Honour, that I hope any judgment that you have to make with respect to this matter will not be made until all of us have an opportunity to examine the record of this day.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that most, if not all, of us in this House regret that this impasse has been reached. I am sure that most, if not all, of us hope that it can be resolved without any precipitate action having to be taken. I must say I agree with the statement Your Honour made that the question period for you today was a difficult one. It is true that a number of the questions were poorly phrased. It was an hour of difficulty for you.

With respect to the exchange between my friend, the hon. member for Egmont, and the government, I must say that if Your Honour erred at all, I think you erred in favour of the hon. member. I heard his question to the Prime Minister. It was to the effect that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion had said something outside the House and the hon. member wanted to know from the Prime Minister whether what he said was a matter of government policy. According to my understanding of the rules, the Minister of Regional