

than six or eight years, particularly some of those in western Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Before I recognize the Hon. Member for Prince Edward—Hastings, the Speaker wishes to hear arguments.

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POINT OF ORDER

ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: The House will remember that several days ago the Hon. Member for Peace River (Mr. Cooper) raised a matter on Questions on the Order Paper. I indicated at that time that at an appropriate time suitable to all three Parties I would hear some discussion on the point. Perhaps we could start with the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of the House that yesterday, on May 29, the Parliamentary Secretary said at page 2228 of *Hansard*, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if you could look at Questions Nos. 45, 52, 53, 62, 64, 83, and 88 in relationship to Standing Order 39(6).

Standing Order 39(6) reads as follows:

(6) If, in the opinion of the Speaker, a question on the *Order Paper* put to a Minister of the Crown is of such a nature as to require a lengthy reply, the Speaker may, upon the request of the government, direct the same to stand as a notice of motion, and to be transferred to its proper place as such upon the *Order Paper*, the Clerk of the House being authorized to amend the same as to matters of form.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Standing Order is practically obsolete, since as far as I know, it has not been used since 1910, at least from what I was able to find out in my research. Using it would have a disastrous effect on the rights of Members to ask questions in this House, and I am thinking more particularly of Members on the Government side, who have questions put on the Order Paper in order to get a detailed response to their concerns, to issues raised by their constituents and to various issues that may have an impact on the general administration of this country.

Point of Order—Mr. Gauthier

If, at the request of the Government, the Speaker of the House transfers such a question to motions, this would have the effect of putting the question at the mercy of the Government's whims, since it would only be called when the Government felt it was opportune to do so.

The problem is that the Government thinks that dealing with such questions is a lengthy and sometimes costly process, and not only involves a lot of time and money but also a lot of effort on the part of certain departments to find the appropriate answers.

I admit the Government is sometimes right when it says: Question numbered *X* is too complex and does not justify the expenditure of public monies. That in fact, is an answer in itself. I realize that. But when the Government tries, through the Chair, to transfer the question to motions, I think that is a covert attempt to gag the Members of this House, the excuse being that some questions will take too long to read in the House or are so complex and technical that an oral response would not do them justice.

Mr. Speaker, the Government already decides in what order the House will consider the business before it, in other words, it decides when the motions will be before the House and what is going to be debated, which bill, and which day will be an Opposition day. In fact, the Government sets the agenda of the House.

However, if we give the Government a chance to get rid of embarrassing questions by having them transferred to motions, obviously it will never get around to them. And as I said earlier, this is just a way to gag the Members of the Official Opposition, the NDP and Government Members as well.

[*English*]

When I researched this question about the Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers, as I said in French a minute ago, I found this Standing Order is an archaic, pre-1910 measure that was put into the Standing Orders to facilitate the answering of questions in the House. We know that since 1910 the common practice has been to make such questions Orders for Return. Rather than putting motions, we just accepted that the question would be made an Order for Return and that was it.