

tude on both sides about the use of the order paper for information will certainly go a long way toward improving the oral question period.

Sixth, a question must be within the administrative responsibility of the government or the minister. Obviously, the government in general cannot be responsible for those areas which are beyond its own administrative responsibility. Furthermore, the minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his ministry; that is, his present ministry. He is responsible to the limits of that ministry, but not beyond that. In this regard I find no reason to change the earlier decision I made in respect of the capacities which ministers enjoyed in previously-held portfolios.

It seems to me that a question which conforms with this basic principle ought not to be interfered with without clear reason. One or two are well known. Obviously, the question must adhere to the proprieties of the House in respect of inference, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House, or out of it for that matter, but this is no more a rule of decorum in the question period than it is out of it. The same rules surround polite language and things of that nature.

There is a clear precedent that if a question has previously been answered, it ought not to be asked again. A question cannot deal with a matter that is before a court. Those are clear restrictions. There are three others which seem to me lend themselves to some confusion. I may be able to clarify them, but I am not sure. The first deals with statements made by ministers outside the House. This, it seems to me, is a matter of form rather than one of substance, for indeed if a question otherwise conforms with the principles I have set out, then it ought not to be disqualified simply because in its preamble some reference is made to a minister or a statement made by a minister somewhere other than here.

For the life of me, I cannot understand why in the case of a valid question a member would want to tie it to a statement made outside the House and therefore risk having it disqualified, when in fact the simple device is to put the question directly without any reference to the statement. Second is the question which seeks an opinion about government policy. The whole area of government policy seems to be one of general confusion.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: What I failed to say was, the whole area of questions about government policy. There have been restrictions related to questions about government policy. It seems to me that a question which seeks an opinion about government policy probably is out of order because it seeks an opinion rather than information. A question which seeks a general statement of government policy may be out of order because it requires the kind of long answer that ought to be given on statements during motions or in debate. But this is the kind of qualification which is referred to in the statement of principle. Otherwise, it seems to me that every question that is asked and answered and which has been held in order for as long as

Oral Question Procedure

the question period goes back, has in one way or another a connection with government policy.

The third area of confusion is in respect of anticipating orders of the day. It is a restriction that is not well understood. If I might express it in my own terms, it simply means that if the subject of debate for today concerns, for example, housing policy, then questions on housing policy ought not to be taken during the question period. That simply, it seems to me, has obvious reference to the currency or importance of the question being taken at that time rather than at some other time.

Similarly, if a special debate has been ordered for later in the day because obviously the topic is very important and very topical, the proper course would be for the Chair to defer questions until that debate is on, rather than to permit them during the question period.

Beyond that, I think a word should be said about points of order and questions of privilege. One of the most significant features of our experimental order is the suggestion to the Chair that points of order and questions of privilege be deferred until three o'clock. I say this is most significant because it is obvious by an expression of the consensus of hon. members that those who prolong their share of the question period by arguing points of order and questions of privilege are really doing nothing more than extending the time that has already been granted to them to put questions. There is no need for a full exposé of questions of privilege and points of order.

● (1510)

Suffice it to say that for the purpose of the question period all hon. members know, and know well, that complaints about the failure of a minister to give an answer, about the quality of the answer that any minister has given, or about discrepancies in answers given by different ministers or by the same minister on different occasions may be valid comments for debate at the appropriate time, but do not by any stretch of the rules constitute a question of privilege or a point of order. Even in handling these matters when they are deferred until three o'clock, it seems to me to be in the best interests of the House, unless a member is able to establish at the beginning when addressing himself to these points that he has a point of order or question of privilege that has some basis in procedure other than a mere complaint of that sort, to discourage members from raising such complaints at the start.

Finally, I should like to add, in respect of hon. members' rights about questions which they feel have not been adequately dealt with during the question period, that there is provision for an adjournment debate. Consideration may be given by the committee to expanding that; certainly it has been recently considered. In any case, it is an excellent way for members who feel that the answer has been too brief or that they have not had the opportunity to fully develop a question, to seek to raise it again in the "late show."

After six sitting days under the experimental order, there can be no doubt that it has been successful, but in my view the success is attributable, as it always is, not so much to the rules themselves or to the power or discretion of the Chair but, rather, to the attitude of members of the