

the maiden speech that was made by the new member today. That was his first opportunity to rise in this House, and I appreciate your not having done anything about it.

However, I would ask you if you could discuss this matter with the House leaders or any other interested group, whether a committee or not, to ascertain whether there is some way of being able to put more questions in the question period. As well, perhaps you could have more control over the type of questions that you allow so that the end result will be that all members of Parliament will be in a better position to ask questions given the limited time in which that can be accomplished.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member raises a point which is of concern to all members of the House. I think he has seen the efforts that I have made from here to try to admonish members, particularly at the beginning of question period, as I did again today. The primary difficulty in this seems to be those who lead off the question period. The putting of a long question, as was the case today and has been the case in many days, at the beginning of question period invites a long answer. In fairness, it is very difficult for the Chair to move in immediately with the first question of the day and try to be very severe and cut short that question. When that question is allowed by the Chair to be a moment or two long, it invites at least an equal answer. Today, for example, the first question and answer of equal length absorbed five full minutes. At that rate, by the time the leader of the New Democratic Party had finished his questions, the question period would have been over if we had continued at that pace.

It is a very difficult chore. I try to admonish members, and here we are dealing with experienced members of the House. The hon. member raises the point that we are dealing with members who are inexperienced and are new but the difficulty is that it is the experienced members who at the head of the question period consistently feel, for whatever reasons—and they are valid reasons—that their question at that point is quite important. It is indeed important; it should be and perhaps it deserves extra treatment. But it does not seem to me to contribute to the importance of the question or the answer by making them overlong. What it does do is contribute immensely and immediately to the frustration of many members. I now have a list running for several days of many members who have simply been denied access to the question period. It is very difficult for them to continue to suffer this denial at the price of an extended performance at the beginning of question period.

I have asked several times for the co-operation of members and I plead with members again to examine this matter to see why it is that members at the end of the question period have to be expected continually to put questions and get answers in a minute or two. They seem to put effective questions and get effective answers. I am wondering why the same thing cannot be done at the beginning of the question period as this would multiply immensely the opportunity for distribution of time and participation throughout the question period. I ask that again, and I ask for co-operation from members on both sides

Point of Order—Mr. Peters

of the House in putting shorter questions and shorter answers, as I think this would go a very long way towards solving the very legitimate matter raised by the hon. member.

● (1520)

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could take just a minute or two on the same point. I want you to know on behalf, I am sure, of most members of the House that if members do not respond to your plea for co-operation most of us in this House would be fully supportive of you if you were to get really tough and just cut them off. It seems to me that if that happened once or twice to a member, even an experienced one, members would start co-operating with you and that would be better for all of us.

I suggest the same thing goes in respect of answers by the government. If they tend to be windy and drag the answers out, and if they do not respond to your plea for co-operation, you should just get really tough and cut them off, and I am sure you would have the overwhelming support of members of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Cape Breton Highlands-Canso): Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to participate in this debate, but I do want to make a point. We have witnessed a very considerable change in the question period over the last while, not beginning in the present Parliament. The question period evolved quite directly and quite obviously into almost a self-disciplining situation during the last Parliament. When I sat on the government side I thought that development was very much to the advantage of the opposition. When this Parliament opened, Your Honour, and when my leader extolled your virtues, one of the points he made was that we hoped the same rights that had been accorded to the opposition in the last Parliament would prevail in this Parliament.

We are prepared to look at changes in the question period, but we will resist very vigorously any attempt to deny to the opposition the rights which were so advantageously and effectively employed by the present members of the government against us when we were in the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sure this House could be tempted to discuss this at great length. I think the point that has to be made is that it must be understood that the Chair is not going to lose during the question period. I have nothing to lose during the question period. I do not put questions. I have to try to preside, not on my behalf, but on behalf of hon. members, and the victims of disorder during the question period are not those who have the responsibility to preside, but those who are trying to participate. They are the ones who pay the price, and that is the concern I am attempting to express.

Therefore, I hope all of these interventions will be examined in the light, not of reducing participation during the question period or of access during that time, but, instead, of increasing it.