

Oral Questions

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):—with respect to this important matter—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):—or exercising some form of discrimination against members on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is interrupted, again in his own interest, I hope, rather than letting him go further in what appears to me to be a rather intemperate observation.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to raise my point of order, having had a long friendship with you and knowing of your deep respect for the Chair. The opposition's job, though, is to examine government spending, to determine whether or not there is waste and whether or not there is efficiency. One of the primary hallmarks of a democracy has to do with a government's tendering process. The government allots tenders. If the contract is over a certain amount of money, it is obliged by the parliamentary rule to accept the best tender. The tenders issued are carefully worded and carefully drawn up with the highest degree of efficiency and accuracy. It is the object of the minister to abide by the tenders he has so issued. I tried on November 9 to pursue this matter. I clearly gave the House and the minister the exact wording of the tender in question and I did so again today. I failed to get a proper answer from the Minister of Transport.

Why have I failed? That question affects all members of the opposition. I failed because of the practice that has grown up in the House of Commons of you, sir, rising and saying that you will now hear somebody else because catcalls have developed from the government side. The government know they are in trouble across the country and they quite correctly and humanly try to defend the minister in trouble, and they let out a bunch of catcalls; and you, sir, believe that those catcalls suggest that the question is not in order. The hon. member for York-Simcoe, who sits close to me, was the lead-off questioner today. His last supplementary question was not even answered by the Minister of Finance because you gave him no chance to answer, and the same thing applied to me.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps all hon. members may be assisted by the common observation that today was perhaps one of the most difficult question periods which has occurred since I have been in the chair. It was difficult because of what happened on an extraordinary number of occasions, in which I include the example referred to by the hon. member for Crowfoot to do with his questions and those put by the hon. member for York-Simcoe.

The observation by the hon. member for Egmont is as close as any that has ever come to being so disrespectful of the

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

actions of the Chair as to amount to contempt, and I am astonished by it.

The considerations which have gone into the decisions I have had to take during the heat of the past question period—indeed, in the heat of all question periods—have nothing to do with any catcalls, observations or references to partisan politics. In the instance referred to today, the supplementary question of the hon. member for York-Simcoe was, in fact, in its substance, a question as to whether or not the Minister of Finance had taken into account the position put forward by the opposition party last spring. That, in terms of even the most elastic definition of the use of the question period, even for a lead-off questioner—and it has been, in my opinion, in almost every instance stretched to the limit for the lead-off questioner—is stretching the principle of the question period beyond the limit.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Besides that, the question, which itself seemed to me to be totally out of order and not seeking in any way information, was preceded by a preamble which was equally and clearly out of order. Finally, after being warned about the preamble, the hon. member for York-Simcoe attempted to follow up by giving reasons for the position put forward by his party last spring. I am going by memory, but if my memory is accurate it seems to me that if we exclude those three disabilities, the question, the preamble and the sequela which followed it, the question was absolutely letter perfect for acceptance by the Chair.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot put a preamble to his question which consisted of reading a regulation to the Minister of Transport which I did not interrupt and which I allowed him to put in some detail. It was far more extensive than the preamble normally allowed. However, I thought in fairness to him that he ought to be able to set the record straight. Unfortunately, in his second question the hon. member for Crowfoot attempted to read further legal language which I thought was an unwarranted use of the question period.

In respect of the hon. member for Egmont who has now risen to express what I can only classify as a rather intemperate and unfortunate observation, I have an instant decision in every case whether or not to permit hon. members to continue. I have cut down the hon. member for York-Simcoe for improper use of the question period, and the hon. member for Crowfoot, both of whom I am sure are unhappy.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must ask the hon. member for Egmont either to apologize for his intemperate remarks or withdraw from the chamber.