

Speaker's Ruling

Speaker, heard the divisions bells ring between 5.45 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. Mr. Speaker, my rights as a parliamentarian were breached because I was unable to exercise my right to vote last night, at 6 p.m.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to make inquiries about the situation we had yesterday in Room 523 in the Wellington Building, to ensure that there are no recurrences, all in the best interests of all Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker: I understand the problem. It isn't just a problem for the Hon. Member for Témiscamingue. We have a problem, and I will immediately make inquiries in order to correct it. I hope that in one or two days or by the end of this week, the problem will be dealt with.

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[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

STANDING ORDER 39(6)—SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr. Speaker: The Chair is now prepared to rule on the point raised on May 29 and May 30, 1989 concerning the uses of Standing Order 39(6) and Questions on the Order Paper.

Before summarizing the situation, I would like to say a word of appreciation for the contribution that Members made to this somewhat complicated question. I should remark that it is really a complicated question and this ruling will take a little time.

It would be appropriate at this point to outline succinctly the procedure on written questions. It provides that Members seeking from the Ministry information relating to public affairs may place on the Order Paper after due notice of 48 hours up to four written questions at any one time. There are several restrictions covering the form and content of such questions. For example, argumentative material or unnecessary facts are not allowed, nor is the offering of opinions on a question. Also, no debate is permitted when a question is put on the Order Paper or when it is answered by the Government. The Clerk of the House has the responsibility to ensure that coherent and concise questions are placed on the Notice Paper as stated in Standing Order 39(2).

Finally, a Member may require that up to three of the four questions be given an oral answer in the House and may also request that the Ministry respond to the question within 45 days.

[Translation]

In due course, the Minister to whom a written question is addressed will answer it, usually through the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader. The answer can be given orally in the House, if an oral answer has been requested, or by handing a written document to the Clerk during Routine Proceedings. Whether the answer is given orally or in writing, the full text will be printed in the Debates of the same day. However, on occasions, because of the length of an answer, a request is made by the Government to have the question made an order for return and the answer is then tabled in the House and filed as a sessional paper which is available, on request, to all Members.

[English]

Let me now summarize the procedural difficulty which I was asked to examine on May 29 and May 30. Briefly, Standing Order 39(6) states that at the request of the Government the Speaker examines a particular question or questions and, if it appears that a question "is of such a nature as to require a lengthy reply, the Speaker—may direct the same to stand as a notice of motion—upon the Order Paper," with such changes in form as are required for this transformation.

On May 29, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader (Mr. Cooper) asked the Chair to deal with seven Order Paper questions in relation to Standing Order 39(6), namely, Questions Nos. 45, 52, 53, 62, 64, 83 and 88.

I advised the House at the time that the Chair would wish to consider the matter with great care and invited interested Members to make comments at a later date.

[Translation]

The next day, a number of Members came forward to assist the Chair in analysing the question. As I have said, these remarks were very helpful.

[English]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader stated what I believe all Members can agree with: that the process of placing questions on the Order Paper is important and fundamental, both to the House and to individual Members on all sides, and that it is a process well worth examining. He then went on to point out that some questions asked are so complicated, require the gathering of so much new information that they are impossible to answer within a 45-day limit and in some cases difficult to answer at all. He said, and I quote his words from page 2338 of *Hansard* of May 30, 1989: