

*Speaker's Ruling*

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands addressed in some detail specific recent precedents and examined carefully the text of the relevant Standing Orders. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader reviewed recent interpretations given to the standing orders on this issue, as did the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I want to thank all hon. members for their contributions.

After considering the issue, as I said I would this morning, the Chair is now ready to render a decision. Since hon. members did present such detailed arguments, I will not review again in detail the precedents cited.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

As most hon. members will be aware, the standing orders of the House of Commons concerning the period of questions and comments were first adopted in November 1982, following recommendations by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure, commonly referred to as the Lefebvre Committee. The committee suggested that "the amendments to the appropriate standing orders be as simple as possible, but that the new debating process be controlled by the Chair", according to certain guidelines.

[*English*]

The House subsequently adopted amendments to its Standing Orders to incorporate this new procedure. The operative sentence in present Standing Order 84(7) reads:

Following the speech of each Member a period not exceeding ten minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses thereto.

While it is true that when this new rule first came into practice in late 1982 it was unclear as to whether or not the question and comment period should apply only to 20 minute speeches or to the longer speeches as well. There is the precedent in December 9, 1983, where the Speaker stated that according to the rules the 10-minute period could be allowed following the unlimited speeches in the Address debate.

Just so that all hon. members will understand that, as well as the public that is listening, it has been the custom

to have unlimited time for the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Official Opposition and, out of courtesy, others.

As a courtesy to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Official Opposition, however, the 10-minute period was not used on that occasion. Several subsequent incidents in the House show members seeking unanimous consent to allow a question and comment period, implying that such consent was a requirement in order to allow this period.

On June 7, 1985, the Chair was called upon to interpret whether this 10-minute questions and comments period should apply to members who were entitled to speak for more than 20 minutes. The Acting Speaker stated that those who have unlimited time do not have a question or comment period.

No instances could be found in our practice where the question and comment period was allowed following a budget speech. Indeed, our practice since 1984 has been consistent in not allowing a question and comment period following anything but 20 minute speeches, except by unanimous consent. This interpretation of the rules is now regarded as a practice of the House and the occupants of the chair have conducted themselves accordingly.

I thank the hon. members for permitting the Chair to clarify the current practice in this matter.

However, the hon. member for Kamloops presents a valid argument about the fairness to a third party of this and other rules governing speeches. The suggestion has been made, however, that these issues be examined by the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges, Procedure and Private Members' Business. This might be a course that hon. members will wish to pursue.

I might also add that I am indebted to the hon. member for Kamloops for a very succinct argument this morning. If it had not been for the clear evidence of a continual practice in this matter, looking at the words of the order itself and other similar orders that were referred to in the Standing Orders I might well have, if I had been making this decision some years ago, come to a different decision. Perhaps the wording ought to be looked at.