

Second, we have a combination of both starred and unstarred questions. It is not really a question of whether that particular question has to be answered here in the House of Commons within 45 days. What is really important is the principle, not simply the time restraints that are on us in terms of what should or should not be answered at that particular time.

There are a few things which have to be clarified. Number one, is the Government responsible to answer every question no matter how complicated it may be within the 45 days? My friend shakes his head yes. I would agree with that, but I would say that at the same time we should be looking for an answer or an opportunity to discuss this issue in a way that addresses the real needs and concerns of the Member who puts that question, no matter what side of the House that Member happens to be on.

Second, we need to know what the definition of the term lengthy is. We need to have some definition of that. What does it mean, lengthy? If we look at Standing Order 39(2), it makes reference to a coherent and concise question. We need to revisit that whole subject of coherent and concise, as it relates to the questions.

The bottom line that we want to make in asking that these questions be looked at is that this is an important process and an important question for the House. Second, by examining the questions that are put on the Order Paper, we then attach to that the validity and the importance of the process. If we just let the whole thing slide and let practices build up which lead us down a path which creates nothing but chaos and irrelevance to the process, then we as Members of this institution are hurt by that. That is why I think it is important that it be examined.

I have sat on the Opposition side. I have sat as a back-bencher. Today, I speak as a Parliamentary Secretary. I have experienced all that. I am not here to argue against the right of Members to put questions. I am here to say that this is a very important process. We do need to examine it. The use of Standing Order 39(6), as I suggested a couple of days ago in this House, is an important consideration that I believe the Speaker should look at. I think that we as a House should not in any way be frightened of that process.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member for Calgary West.

Point of Order—Mr. Hawkes

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, in coming here today I was interested in listening to the arguments put forward. It was not my intention to rise but I think that as an officer of the House both in my present capacity and as someone who has done the same job that the Member from Peace River is doing in this Parliament, I should share my experience with the House.

I rise because of the arguments advanced by the first two speakers for the official Opposition and the third Party in the House that led me to rise. I think what they are inviting you to do, Mr. Speaker, is to ignore the rule in some fashion that would encourage you to rewrite the rules of the House. That would be a very dangerous course to follow. It may very well be that Members of the Opposition would like the rules rewritten, but I do not think it is appropriate for you, Mr. Speaker, to be invited to rewrite the rules. When a rule exists I think it is the responsibility of the Chair to act within the rules of the House and to fulfil the obligations that fall upon his office.

• (1550)

The Hon. Member for Peace River (Mr. Cooper) has asked that this rule come into force when the Government requests it. Then you, Sir, have an obligation to consider the matter and you have a power to transfer a question on the Order Paper to notices of motions.

There has been a lot said about this being a denigration of the right of freedom of speech. It is important to recognize that a question on the Order Paper is not discussed in the House. It is a written question, a written reply, and is printed in our proceedings, but there is no speech involved in the process in the Chamber.

Mr. Milliken: It can be oral.

Mr. Hawkes: If it is oral it is simply that the reply is oral. There is no debate.

The Government is asking the Chair to transfer certain items from the Order Paper into a form which is debatable so freedom of speech can take place. Members should read, I believe it is Rule 97. Once that is done the item shall be debated for 90 minutes. It is a debatable motion so more expansion, contraction and precision can come to the question. That is what the process of amendment is all about. An amendment could be made to the question itself. More important, the House must pronounce itself. The question must be put after 90