

Point of Order—Mr. Peters

to permit us to go into the Senate and ask these questions, or in the alternative—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Walter Baker (President of the Privy Council and Minister of National Revenue): On that question of privilege raised by my hon. friend, Mr. Speaker, I want him to know that if he would consent, we would be very pleased to appoint the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) to the Senate so that he would have a voice there.

Mr. Knowles: Never!

● (1510)

[Translation]

MR. GUAY—PRIME MINISTER'S ATTITUDE REGARDING ORAL QUESTION ASKED IN HOUSE

Mr. Raynald Guay (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. A while ago, during the oral question period, my personal rights were encroached upon. I rose on behalf of several thousand unemployed, shipyard workers, not only from the province of Quebec but from the whole of Canada. I thought I had put a very important question to the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Clark) and I see that, even now, he does not deign to listen to me because he is talking with the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Miss MacDonald). That is indicative of the importance he attaches to the unemployed. There are more than 5,000 unemployed in our Canadian shipbuilding industry. I merely want to say, Mr. Speaker, that since the right hon. Prime Minister did not deign to give me a reply, I shall see to it that the shipyard workers unions and the workers throughout Canada are advised of the scorn he showed for the importance of the question I put to him just a few minutes ago.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House understands full well, I am sure, that it was the Speaker, and not the Prime Minister, who decided to turn down the question put this afternoon by the hon. member for Lévis. Despite the importance and urgency of the matters being brought up, it is absolutely imperative that the questions always be put according to our practice and precedents.

* * *

[English]

POINT OF ORDER

MR. PETERS—OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS TO ASK QUESTIONS

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order partly in relation to the question period today and partly following some comments Your Honour made during the question period. Many members of this House are denied the opportunity of asking questions. I was one of those who was here when question period went on as long as members wanted to ask questions. I have seen question period

[Mr. Waddell.]

go on until eight or nine o'clock at night under previous governments. We reformed the rules to eliminate that so as to make question period more meaningful and allow most members to ask whatever questions they wished.

The question period is structured and it is being structured by the parties, but there does not seem to be any control, advice or instructions being given to individual members or ministers as to how question period would be most advantageous for members of Parliament as well as for the viewers who now watch question period. I can raise this without much difficulty because I am not one who has participated unduly in question period over the last few years.

I have spoken to many members who I find are totally dissatisfied that they cannot ask questions. I agree that many of the questions are not properly asked. Some questions have too long a preamble and in some cases Your Honour has to ask if the member has a question. After two or three minutes it is not always obvious whether a question has been asked.

I would like to see you, Mr. Speaker, enforce a set of rules that would be designed in such a way as to allow the elicitation of the largest number of questions possible. I would like to see you charged with making the decision autocratically as to when there is too much preamble and not enough question. This would allow as many members of Parliament who wished to ask questions.

It would seem to me that if a member on behalf of his constituents wished to ask a question, he should be able to do that at least within a week, but if he cannot do that within a week, then obviously the question is out of date and there is really no point in asking that question. It seems to me that we have given you that responsibility by shortening the question period, making it only three-quarters of an hour rather than an unlimited question period, and if members are to be satisfied we better extend the length of question period or, as members of Parliament collectively, we should make a decision that there will be less preamble and more question.

If a snappy question is asked of a minister, he is going to be in difficulty if he does not give a snappy answer. Sometimes a member goes all over the waterfront in asking a question. Certainly the first two questions that were asked today were fairly good speeches and probably would do the members credit in having asked them in the way they did if they were making a speech, but questions they were not.

I know Your Honour has a great deal of other responsibilities and the job is not a cinch anyway, but the House has really given you the responsibility for meeting the requirements of allowing as many questions as possible in that very limited three-quarters of an hour that we have allocated for this purpose.

Question period is really now the window of Parliament as far as the public is concerned. I think they must be as disgusted as I am sitting here listening to many questions and answers knowing full well that there are many other members who would be able to ask questions on behalf of their constituents if they were given the opportunity. I have no objection to