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● (1530)

I am not going to trouble you with all the quotations. They are there. I can give the page numbers if anyone wants to look at them. They are in *Hansard* at pages 2469, 2470, 1368, and so on. I will not trouble the House with them, but hon. members will find it is very definitely pointed out. For example, when I first came in in 1957, the Hon. Lionel Chevrier stated:

Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the government through the House leader. I should like to know if the government would not speed up the answers to questions now on the order paper. I am informed that there are some 47 questions that remain unanswered. There are as of today five starred questions that are unanswered, and I am sure there are a number of orders for returns—

He went on to state he believed those starred questions should be answered.

I want to come to my conclusions. It is my belief that the starred question was so designated because of its complexity, and making it short enough to fit in for an oral answer by the minister in the House and to give the minister the necessary time in which to look for information required. In other words, it was an opportunity for the opposition to be a little more dutiful in their work, which is to probe for mistakes. It was also a chance for the government to answer a question in a little better style and not have it repeated over and over again to get to the proper conclusion that was satisfactory to the questioner.

The starred question should be given its rightful place, as was confirmed in 1955. The Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization should deal with this question which it failed to deal with over a period of two years, since there seems to have been a silent erosion and maybe a lassitude on the part of the committee to deal with this matter, and by so doing restore the right of the private member to have a starred question answered within a set limit of time. The status of the starred question should be settled. Either it is a useful tool and should be placed in the status quo position, or it should be removed entirely.

I have brought this up for the sake of parliament and for the sake of the position that Your Honour occupies as the ruler and referee of this House, because leaving a question in that position is hardly fair either for a Speaker or private member, or indeed for the government.

All any minister who fails to answer a question within a fair period of time, if he does not have an answer prepared in a week for reasons beyond his control, would have to do is telephone the hon. member or Mr. Speaker to give his reasons, and nobody would be upset about it, and he would be given further time.

I know I had Your Honour's co-operation in this. The first thing I did after raising this matter which led to your reply was to write a letter, dated February 28, 1975, to the then President of the Queen's Privy Council, the hon. member for Eglington (Mr. Sharp), telling him I would like to appear

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before the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization in order to bring their attention to a point which I thought should be looked at and cleared up. I went on from there, not only by letter but by conversation, on many occasions. Over two months ago, and again about a month ago, I spoke to the chairman about this. He knew very well that this was coming up.

I then took the trouble to inform the parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale), that this was coming up before the House. I do not think it can be left, not only for Your Honour's sake, but for the sake of every member of this House to be carried on in this fashion. We should be respecting the position of the Right Hon. Wilfrid Laurier and other people who have gone before us.

In the democratic process, erosion should never destroy that which is useful to democracy's survival.

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that some days ago the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Rynard) gave me notice of his intention to raise this concern which he obviously holds very deeply and has researched very extensively.

I can understand the sincere representations which he has made through the House to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. I hope the members of that committee will take note of his remarks today and take an early opportunity to consider the worthwhile suggestions which he has made.

As he pointed out, at least twice before the hon. member has raised this concern in the House, on February 27, 1975, reported in *Hansard* at page 3265, and again last summer, July 6, 1976, reported in *Hansard* at page 15080. In both cases, Mr. Speaker, your response to the point was very clear cut and very clearly in accordance with the established rules and precedents of the House; first, that the star entitles the hon. member to an oral answer, but not the right to demand an answer within a specified period of time; second, that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization might examine this question in the course of its re-examination of the procedures of this House.

I have looked quickly at that committee's subcommittee report. I believe that report made one reference to questions on the order paper, which appears in volume 30-9-76 at page 30:61. However, that reference deals only with the place of questions in the daily order of business. I do not believe that the committee actually got to the point of considering the status of starred questions. The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) was the chairman of that subcommittee. He might well correct my interpretation of the subcommittee's report. However, I do not believe they actually gave their consideration to that point as Your Honour previously invited them to do, and as the hon. member for Simcoe North has obviously done again.

These representations today are very worth-while in the sense that the members of the committee may want to take a look at that issue. However, I think that the rules and prece-