

● (1510)

**Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth):** I know of too many cases, which I will not cite here, of lengthy preambles which are irrelevant and argumentative. These diatribes-cum-political statements are being smuggled in. Some Members are speaking for too long and other Members are suffering the penalty of the clock running out at the 45-minute mark. Moreover, these violations of rules are annoying to the public because once Your Honour rises to intervene, those watching hear only the barracking, name-calling, and general school-room hubbub which does nothing to enhance the dignity of this place.

I realize, Sir, that the lengthy partisan pitches put you as Speaker in a difficult position. A Minister will naturally move in and take on the argumentative nature of the preamble before he or she gets to the substance of the question, and that is only fair.

But we are also having constant repetition because when one opposition Party happens to pre-empt a second opposition Party on a question, then the question is asked not once, not twice, but five times or ten times to try to get different answers and to try to make the national news. When constantly repetitive questions are asked again we are in clear violation of the rules under Beauchesne's.

**Ms. Copps:** We never get any answers and we will continue to ask the questions.

**Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth):** If the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) will quieten down for a moment more, I can remember former Liberal Government appointed Speakers and I think particularly of the Hon. Lucien Lamoureux, and Speaker James Jerome, who were constantly admonishing Conservative and New Democratic opposition Members about repetitious questions which clearly are out of order, and detailed questions which should be placed on the Order Paper.

In conclusion, if we do not exactly need to overhaul Question Period, there are a couple of routes that we could take to restore some of the dignity and decorum of this place. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest that one route we could take would be to refer Question Period concerns to the House Leaders of the three Parties, or second, and perhaps preferable, to the House Leadership of the colleagues who have enough on their plates these days, it might be advisable to set up an *ad hoc* committee of concerned colleagues on all sides of the House to compile our thoughts and suggestions on tightening up Question Period.

The goal would be to allow for better exchanges and more questions, thereby making life easier on Members and on our viewing audience. Clearly we need some mechanism to resurrect the true nature of Question Period and to make more effective this most high profile hour of any sitting day.

*Point of Order—Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth)*

**Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West):** Mr. Speaker, with an unusual display of crocodile tears unheard of in this Parliament, if not in the history of Parliament, whether or not he realizes it, the Hon. Member has reflected unfairly on your conduct, Sir, of Question Period. The Hon. Member has made continued reference to what he calls the "rules". There are only two references in the rules, that is, the Standing Orders of the House with respect to Question Period. One Standing Order relates to when in the day Question Period takes place, and how long it should be, and it is 45 minutes, not one hour. Second, Standing Order 65(1)(a) states:

Questions on matters of urgency may, at the time specified in Standing Order 19(4), be addressed orally to Ministers of the Crown, provided however that, if in the opinion of the Speaker a question is not urgent, he or she may direct that it be placed on the *Order Paper*.

This has always been interpreted to mean that the Speaker has the absolute discretion as to the type of questions and, for that matter, the answers, that may be allowed during Question Period. However, from time to time individual Speakers have announced guidelines as to how they would use the power given to them under the Standing Orders with respect to Question Period. These guidelines have been published in successive editions of Beauchesne's.

My hon. friend has failed to note that the most recent set of guidelines were those announced in this Parliament by your distinguished predecessor. Those guidelines were set down some time after this Parliament began, and some time after the practices which my hon. friend appears to be complaining of were established and very much in terms of precedents as to what were accepted, not only by yourself, but your predecessors in other Parliaments.

I want to point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that if my hon. friend is complaining about preambles, if my hon. friend is complaining about the content of questions, then in all fairness he should also talk about the answers. He should particularly talk about the length of answers and what often appears to be a deliberate effort, and I hope I am wrong in this, on the part of Ministers answering to talk out Question Period and to do the very thing my hon. friend complains of, that is, to prevent Hon. Members on both sides of the House from putting questions within the time limited by the rules for Question Period.

I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to this rather strange and unfortunate lack of balance in the point of order of my hon. friend. Everything my hon. friend complains of was done over and over again in previous Parliaments by members of his Party when they were in Opposition and therefore precedents were established in terms of preambles, in terms of length of questions, and in terms of content of questions which I do not think that my hon. friend can credibly complain of at this time because of what he and his colleagues did when they were in Opposition.

In conclusion, as far as I am concerned you have the judgment, Mr. Speaker, in the exercise of the authority given to you under our rules to deal with the matter of Question