

Point of Order—Mr. Cooper

being the Members themselves, the budgets and staffing that goes on within the various departments, and as well, the Cabinet people that are involved in these types of answers. We want to see that there is a fair utilization of those resources.

What has been happening over the years is that we have been falling into a habit that has some dangerous implications. What seems to be coming is that there no longer is a questioning of how lengthy a particular question is. There is no longer a concern about how impossible it may be to answer.

My hon. friend, the House Leader for the NDP referred to a couple of answers that were made. I have to tell him that I am not happy with those answers. I am not happy with an answer that says: "We cannot find out that information. We do not know what is going on there. We cannot find that out without doing this, this, this and this." In my opinion, that is not the type of answer for which a Member is looking.

Essentially what we are looking for is a way to examine the questions and say: "Can they be fairly answered or should they be better dealt with in another forum? Is there another place that we can look at them?" What my colleagues from the other side have argued is that this is an archaic Standing Order. It has not been used since 1910, and therefore, because it is that old, perhaps—

An Hon. Member: 1923.

Mr. Cooper: 1923, which is correct. That since it has not been used for that long, it is redundant. It is a bit of a dinosaur.

I think there is another point that has to be made. Since 1923, we have had considerable numbers of reforms to the Standing Orders in this particular House of Commons. I know that because I have been part of that process. Standing Order 39(6), the one we are dealing with today, has survived all of those reforms. I believe it has survived those reforms because there was a reason for it. It was an important part of the rules. Had it not have been important, there would have been a need on the part of those of us involved in the reforms to either

change it or abolish it. It was left there for a purpose. I think that that purpose is very legitimate.

What we have seen in the last little while are questions that have become complicated. One of the questions that we looked at in the most recent time required a co-ordination of 60 different departments and agencies in order to collect the answer for the House of Commons. On top of that, we were asked as a Government to do that within 45 days. I suggest to this House that that is, for all intents and purposes, impossible.

We are not arguing against the principle of the questions. That principle is an important one and we support it. What we are arguing is that there has to be a fairness in the process.

I think we need to look at a couple of the elements of Standing Order 39(6). First, it states that we have the right as a Government to ask the Speaker to examine the question and determine whether or not it requires too lengthy an answer or whether it is complicated in such a fashion that it would be impossible for the Government to answer it with any kind of time restriction or reasonableness.

What happens if that is the case, Mr. Speaker? It is not, as I think my colleagues opposite have said, then transferred to something that is controlled by the Government. As I understand it, it is transferred to motions which then go into the Private Member's realm, and as a result of that, the rights of the Private Members are in fact protected because that motion then becomes debatable. It becomes votable and it becomes amendable. As a result of that, the Private Member's rights are in fact protected, rather than inhibited.

I think by putting these questions before the Speaker, we have brought back to the House a rule that has an important function and purpose.

I want to explain, Mr. Speaker, why the questions that we referred to you were chosen. They were chosen for a specific reason. First, they are non-partisan. We have questions from all Parties of the House.