

Oral Questions

mally worried about whether they are going to get their cheques, let me assure the hon. member that they will get them. If there is any danger that the cheques will not be delivered by mail, we will place them at appropriate depots in various constituencies. There are certain senior citizens who, for physical reasons, cannot travel to those locations, and my suggestion was that in those cases we would be glad to deliver those cheques through local service agencies and, hopefully, civic-minded members of parliament.

Mr. Smith (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise on a point of order. I have been sitting here for the last four months observing the performance, especially of the Postmaster General, and although I am an auctioneer, a fairly good one I think, I doubt very much if I could even get an opening bid if he were put on the auction block.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nowlan: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get into the auction business, but I am going to raise a point of order that certainly affects my privileges, and one about which I am getting very irritated.

An hon. Member: You are always irritated.

Mr. Nowlan: Yes, I am. I have been sitting here for a week trying to ask a question of the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) on a matter which broke about this time last week, or at least it was in the newspapers last Friday. The Solicitor General, unfortunately, was not here on Monday or on Wednesday, on which occasions I did not move out of my seat, but on Tuesday, Thursday and today I have tried to catch Your Honour's eye. I do not know whether the story could still be considered relevant, but I think it is. The Solicitor General did stay in the House today, I think hoping that at least one member would be recognized in order to ask a question on this subject.

With all due respect to Your Honour, I cannot for the life of me understand how you can recognize hon. members in front of me, to the right of me, to the left of me and behind me—some hon. members have not only been recognized once but twice in the last week, and my seatmate was recognized once yesterday in absentia—yet when I was standing at the same time Your Honour could not recognize me. Perhaps Your Honour has forgotten the name of the riding I have the honour to represent. I say to Your Honour that many things have happened in this last month in relation to the decorum and rules of this House which are starting to irritate me. As far as the question period is concerned, aside from any criticism about whether the opposition is handling the question period properly, I believe the question period has been effectively gutted.

I should like to ask, as I almost did yesterday when we were discussing the business of the House, either through Your Honour or directly through the House leader, that Order No. 10 under Government Business, which has to do with the procedures of this House, be referred to the Committee on Procedure and Organization. Then, perhaps this charade, farce or, as far as I am concerned, completely irrelevant question period, can be restored to a meaningful thing and we can get some drive or momentum back into it.

[Mr. Mackasey.]

I have other points I could mention that reflect upon the Chair, but I am not going to get into them today.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nowlan: In the ruling you made on Friday last, you said that the House was the master of its own rules, referring to the flood of Cr ditiste motions under Standing Order 43, yet on Wednesday when we were back on another motion under Standing Order 43 we were unable to discuss it because of procedure; there seems to be a contradiction that must be straightened out. There also have been some other ad hoc decisions which I think have to be straightened out.

The sooner we refer this question of procedure to the committee, the sooner the irritation felt by a number of members on this side of the House can be corrected, and Your Honour can again continue to be the conscience of this House. Quite frankly, as far as I am concerned, my conscience is no part of the collective conscience of the Chair.

Some hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Mr. Speaker: Having regard to the question of privilege or point of order raised by the hon. member, let me say that, as the hon. member will have observed today, the question period should have concluded at about two minutes past 12, but knowing there were several members who sought an opportunity to pose their questions this week I deliberately extended the question period some 10 minutes in an attempt to accommodate as many of those members as possible. The hon. member for Annapolis Valley (Mr. Nowlan), whose constituency and parliamentary performance I know and understand very well, is one of those who was unable to be recognized today or yesterday. He joins a number of others I could name, if he wishes me to expose the names, as I have kept a careful record during the last several weeks. The list includes his colleagues sitting in front of him, behind him and beside him.

There is simply a physical limitation to the number of members I am able to recognize in any question period. I deeply regret that the hon. member takes so seriously the fact that he was among those not recognized. He must surely understand that he joins several of his colleagues each day in that category, and this is as much a source of regret to me as it is to him.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising out of the discussion that has just taken place. Perhaps the House would be willing now to pass, without debate, the item of government business which is No. 10 on the Order Paper under Government Business, allowing that committee to get on with its job.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I offered to do this the other day. I do agree with the hon. member that it is time that committee of the House had a look at our rules. For instance, there are many of them dealing with supply and so on that deserve consideration, so I would be very happy, speaking on behalf of members on this side of the House, if we could pass that item now without debate.