

House full of hootin' and hollerin'

Liberals question decorum in the legislature

By DAVE BARTLETT

THE TELEGRAM

It's gone beyond banging on tables. Insults, cat calls, and various jabs have been flying to and fro during question period this week at the House of Assembly.

After question period Tuesday, Liberal House leader, Kelvin Parsons raised the behaviour of some members as a point of order.

"Nobody here is opposed to a bit of humour," said Parsons. "What we've seen in the last two days, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely I would suggest unacceptable. Some of the comments flowing back and forth across this

House are nasty."

Parsons noted that cat calls continued to come while he made his point of order to Speaker Roger Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald had to call for order seven times during Tuesday's session.

"If there's an issue of decorum, it's up to Your Honour to notice it as I'm sure Your Honour does," deputy premier Tom Rideout said addressing Fitzgerald. "The suggestion is that Your Honour is not doing your job. It's probably not the intent, but that's the way it sounds to me."

Most of the interruptions on both days this week have come during heated debates between Liberal

Leader Yvonne Jones and Minister of Education Joan Burke.

"Mr. Speaker, yesterday I ended up leaving here after question period with a strained throat because I was trying to ask questions," said Jones during Tuesday's sparring match with Burke. "I'd appreciate it if they could keep the noise down today."

Later the exchange between the two women escalated as they debated teacher allocation.

"The problem that that minister got is she can't admit when she's wrong and something is not working," shouted a fuming Jones over the brewing ruckus with Burke.

That's when the Speaker again had

to call for order.

"Mr. Speaker, no trouble to know the premier's away," continued Jones. "The boys are gonna play now, Mr. Speaker, they're all out on the playground now, Mr. Speaker."

Burke was not impressed.

"Let me begin by saying there's more than boys on this side of the house and to be referred to as boys is an absolute insult," said the minister whose voice was being drowned out by hoots and hollers from government members.

"I intended to give the women on the other side of the House a little bit more credit than that, but, obviously, I was wrong and I'll group them all

into one category if it makes the minister happy," responded Jones with a laugh.

But outside the House Jones wasn't laughing.

"There's 44 government members," she said, her voice showing strain from the debate. "They have not been conducting themselves appropriately in question period."

Jones noted that the opposition lost four of the 30 minutes allotted for questions which, she says, means some questions aren't being asked and — more importantly — being answered.

dbartlett@thetelegram.com