

Standing Orders

judgment to bear upon the issues of the country in the interest, not only of one constituency but of the whole realm. I urge upon all members, as I am sure they all have, to read that statement of Burke's to remind themselves of the importance in this house of every private member from every constituency in this country.

Mr. Cleaver: Having concluded that, would the hon. member mind if I asked a question?

Mr. Knowles: Is the hon. member going back to the question he asked a moment ago?

Mr. Cleaver: No. My question is this. Do you not admit that all four recommendations which I have put forward in my resolution are less restrictive as to debate than are the rules in Westminster, or is he criticizing Westminster?

Mr. Knowles: The situation at Westminster and here are different in so many particulars that it is almost impossible to make a comparison. May I point out—

Mr. Cleaver: All your quotations are from the old country.

Mr. Knowles:—that frequent reference is made to the fact that at Westminster they fix these periods of time at the end of which a vote is taken. I would point out that if there are members who still wish to speak on the day the vote is to be taken the debate sometimes continues all night. Indeed you have these 23-hour sessions. In other words, so long as people still want to speak—

Mr. Cleaver: I must quarrel with the hon. member on that point. The debate only carries on when a motion is made for it to continue; otherwise a vote is taken at the end of the agreed period. I cited one case where, during a debate on the address, fifty members wanted to speak but only twelve spoke and then the vote was taken.

Mr. Knowles: No doubt it happened the way the hon. member says it was recorded on that particular occasion, but I have been over there and seen the members of that parliament in action. It is not always acceptable to a member to withdraw, and if he does not wish to withdraw that day's sitting continues until those who wish to speak have spoken. Sometimes a debate goes on continuously for 23 hours, or longer. You have, therefore, a case where you are not denying to the private member his right to be heard for fifteen minutes or seven minutes, whatever it may be, if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Cleaver: All I am asking for is the Westminster practice.

Mr. Knowles: No, you are not asking for the Westminster practice at all. You are

asking for a curtailment of the practice that is now in vogue here. I may say, Mr. Speaker, that this whole business of comparing Westminster with the situation here has been gone into by others. It was fully investigated by Dr. Beauchesne in the days when he was clerk. He prepared a lengthy report on this matter which Mr. Speaker Fauteux presented to the house back in 1947. The report pointed out that there are great differences, geographical amongst others, between the United Kingdom, where you have a small compact country, largely homogeneous, as compared with the wide expanse of our country and all the different interests we have from coast to coast. This report is to be found in the *Journals* for Friday, December 5, 1947, from pages 7 to 32.

A portion of that discussion, which is to be found on pages 10 and 11, points out many of those differences that exist between that country and ours which result in it being necessary for us to pay some attention to the British practice, but to recognize also that we have a Canadian situation, and that we have to develop a parliamentary practice of our own based on British principles and yet clearly Canadian. I would point out that in that same report which was presented to this house by Dr. Fauteux—I think it is fair to say he had the assistance of Dr. Beauchesne in preparing it—he said this, as reported on page 10 of the *Journals* of December 5, 1947:

The mere object of shortening sessions must not be the aim of any revision of our rules. The duties of a representative parliament are too important to be performed in a hurry. No question should be decided until it has been fully discussed.

Mr. Weir: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make an interjection. The hon. member, in his reference to Burke's speech about the duties of a member of parliament, interjected an inference to the effect that members who did not make speeches but merely voted were rubber stamps. I do not think that is a proper inference to be made. In its implication it naturally refers to a greater extent to government members than it does to opposition members. I venture to say that even in the governments of the United Kingdom a lot of members have voted with their parties, even though they have not made speeches, and in that sense the hon. member would refer to them as rubber stamps.

I believe that the hon. member will agree that members on the government side, and even in his own party, quite frequently vote without making speeches. Whether or not they are voting exactly according to the dictates of their conscience we do not know, but in that sense they are rubber stamps. Government members, may I point out, have opportunities that opposition members do not have