

and bring about a more practical method of transacting the affairs of the country.

The United States House of Representatives many years ago were driven, by long discursive speeches and waste of time, to the adoption of rules for the purpose of saving time. Some of these rules we shall have before us if a committee is given for our guidance, as well as the rules and regulations of the English House of Commons. In the United States House of Representatives, for instance, speeches are limited to one hour, a time is fixed for the closing of debate, and after a certain stage of debate speeches are limited to five minutes. Several speakers may, of course, give up their time to one, but all the time that each speaker is entitled to is five minutes. Any amendment made to an original motion, which, in our case, opens the whole field of discussion again, can only be presented in a speech of fifteen minutes, and must be replied to in a speech of ten minutes, and the debate upon it is then closed. It was found imperatively necessary to adopt rules of this character in order to get the business of the country through within a reasonable time. We are reaching the same position which existed in the United States when these rules were adopted. We had a session of six months last year, during which we had thirty-three motions to adjourn, which led to a practical waste of thirty-three days, and an expenditure of that time on questions which did not appear on the Order paper. In the meantime hon. members had to wait from day to day, and from week to week, and from month to month, to reach motions they had on the Order paper. That was the case with myself, and even then I did not reach the motion I had on the paper for final action at all. Without enlarging further on the question, I may say that we are all aware that much valuable time is thus wasted, and that it is desirable to adopt rules for the securing of greater pertinence and brevity in the character of the speeches, and greater speed in the despatch of business.

The committee, if granted, will have this question under its consideration, and will make what suggestions or recommendations to this House it may think fit. These can be dealt with by the House, and the House is not committed, by the granting of this motion, to anything the committee may recommend. Unless this House adopts any recommendation of the committee, of course, there will be no change, but I think, considering the circumstances, considering the methods we have fallen into in the discharge of our duties, it would be wise to adopt a committee to consider what should be done, and then leave the matter in the hands of the House.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN, (Halifax). I would suggest to the hon. gentleman (Mr. Charlton) that there hardly seems any oc-

Mr. CHARLTON.

casion for presenting this motion at the present time. It is true that the methods of debate in any deliberative assembly must always demand attention. It is possible that, sometimes, time is wasted in this House. I suppose that the same can be said of any deliberative body. Until we become perfect, it is absolutely impossible to conduct the business without wasting more or less time. But the move which the hon. gentleman (Mr. Charlton) proposes is one of a great deal of importance, and I expected to have heard a word from the right hon. gentleman who leads the House in regard to it. It is a matter that does not affect solely this parliament, or this session; it is a matter that will be of very serious moment to future parliaments. There are two things that must be borne in mind in dealing with it—in the first place, to secure the transaction of public business without waste of time, and in the second place, to secure to every man in the House of Commons as great liberty in discussion and criticism as is consistent with the transaction of public business in a legitimate way.

Mr. CHARLTON. The resolution proposes that that shall be secured.

Mr. BORDEN (Halifax). But the question is, whether or not, in the House of Commons of Canada at the present time, there is need of any change. If there is to be a change, the hon. gentleman (Mr. Charlton) has not given us any light as to the particular methods which will be suggested to the committee which he moved. I think that this is a matter in which we shall do well to 'hasten slowly.' We should not take it upon ourselves within a few days of the opening of this first session of a new parliament, to deal with a matter of this kind, which, possibly, in the opinion of a great many members of the House is not a matter that very urgently requires to be dealt with at all.

The PRIME MINISTER (Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier). My hon. friend (Mr. Charlton) has reminded the House that this is not the first time he has introduced a motion similar to this. In fact, if I remember aright, this is the third time that my hon. friend has brought this identical motion to the attention of the House. On previous occasions I did not for my part favour the passing of such a motion; and I see no reason to modify the views I formerly entertained. I agree with my hon. friend that in the last parliament the speeches we listened to, were, perhaps, of a somewhat inordinate length. At that time, I said that I would rely upon the good sense of the House to remedy that evil without taking any formal step to do so. I have reason to believe that this parliament will see, in these matters, a very marked improvement. I suppose that this year, parliament will come back to the old practice of delivering speeches of moderate length, and that there