

Questions on Orders of the Day

I mentioned the other day that I thought we should be able to cover the most important questions in 30 minutes, but it would all depend on whether they were answered. It would also depend on whether Your Honour was allocating the questions on the basis set out in paragraph 3. In the United Kingdom, where there is a restriction on the right to ask questions which come within the rules, if a member is not satisfied with the answer he gets from the government he has a recourse. But you, sir, in setting forth your plan, say in effect that questions of privilege or points of order cannot be raised during the 30 minutes. On one hand we have a rule that points of order or questions or privilege must be raised immediately; on the other hand, you suggest the substitution of a new formula of procedure.

We want to co-operate fully, but if there were to be any limitation there would have to be a change made so there would not be an automatic adjournment of the house at ten o'clock at night. Whenever a member of the U.K. parliament finds that his question is not properly answered, or not satisfactorily dealt with, he has the right to rise and announce that at the end of the day's sitting he intends to raise the subject. If the time is limited to 30 minutes and the right to raise points of order or privilege is denied, I submit with the greatest deference that a change would have to be made so that we would not be at the mercy of the government in the discharge of our responsibilities. In these circumstances this part of your suggestion should, I think, go to the committee.

Your Honour suggests that though points of order or questions of privilege would not be allowed with respect to any ruling of the Chair, any member who felt himself seriously aggrieved might be permitted to raise a question of privilege about a decision of the Chair at the close of the question period. If that were the course followed, the half hour would not be the length of the question period, and there would be no effective saving of time in this regard.

For my part I offer you the fullest co-operation, Mr. Speaker. Personally I have tried, though I may not always have succeeded, to keep within the rules, as I know hon. members opposite have tried. I regard it as of primary importance in order to maintain the prestige of parliament that we do not abuse the rules.

This being so, I think the various suggestions Your Honour has made should go to the committee, except that one relating to the strong enforcement of the rules. If you follow that you will have my fullest co-operation in every way.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): It appears, Mr. Speaker, that you are not going to get any help from the Pharisees in driving the Pharisees out of this temple. In these circumstances there is not much point in my comments on behalf of my colleagues, or for this group. The former prime minister has indicated that he does not see eye to eye with your proposals; therefore there is little point in making further comments, except to say that we were prepared to co-operate with regard to the idea of the half hour, though we were somewhat concerned over the suggestion to call hon. members in proportion to the size of the groups to which they belong. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, that can go to the committee now.

We would like to assure you that we will give our co-operation, but we would also like to appeal to you not to be discouraged by the response you have had to your suggestions. If you should get tough and rough, as long as we see the elementary fairness that I think we will see we will be prepared to go along with that. I suggest that in view of what has been said, particularly by the previous speaker, the burden is now upon you, Mr. Speaker, and we will look forward to seeing you bear that burden.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition has gone to great lengths to point out what has been the practice in the parliament of the United Kingdom. I would say there is an ample record of other parliaments, equally based on the traditions of the mother of parliaments that we follow, where they have very successfully limited the question period in fairness to all members of the house, even where there are more than two parties.

I believe the proposition that you have made is a sound one and that we should give it a try. We will co-operate with you, sir, in carrying on the business of the all-important question period, recognizing that you have the responsibility for the effective and efficient functioning of the house. I believe we should also give our fullest support to the committee, because it is made up of members of all parties in the house, and that we should make every effort not only to co-operate but to work together to make our functioning here more effective.

[Translation]

Mr. Real Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, as I said Thursday when you brought forth your six-point suggestion, we are ready to co-operate to the fullest extent possible toward the application of the proposals you made last week.