

*Standing Orders*

of their own constituents. I am going to take issue with anybody who says that. I have never believed, since I came to this house, that time was wasted in listening to the ordinary private member on the back benches. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I very often find them more interesting, more instructive, and I am quite sure more informative as to the exact position with respect to Canadian affairs than some of those who have almost become professional in their advocacy of certain things on all sides of the House of Commons. Therefore I want to put in a word for the back bencher. I myself was a back bencher geographically for a long time. I have never considered myself anything more than that, although I now sit in the front row. I think that when we get to the position in parliament where we become just advocates for advocacy's sake, we lose our identity and our power and our influence, because actually the man who is on the back bench and who is representing that part of Canada which he knows best has something to contribute; and when he contributes, even if he speaks for only forty minutes, as is the case now, we ought to consider what he says, and the government ought to take heed, because he does represent a section of Canada just as though he were sitting beside the Prime Minister of Canada. That is of great importance.

When we take visitors through the House of Commons they often ask us to point out the seat the Prime Minister occupies. They always look at the Speaker's seat, because they have the idea that it must be the Prime Minister's. When you show them that the Prime Minister's seat in this house is the same as anybody else's seat, so far as its structure is concerned, they marvel at it. The reason is, of course, that in a great sense every member of the house has equal rights. Having that in mind, of course these rights have to be preserved. I do not want it ever to be said that we should get to the point where we can have just a little ring of members around the front who are doing all the debating and while the people on the back benches keep quiet for the rest of their lives. That is not what we should be doing.

More than that, when I hear people saying that the reason why we should have shorter speeches is the time that the back benchers take up, I take issue with them. I have never believed that. I have never been in favour of reducing the time of the ordinary back bencher who makes a speech perhaps once or twice a year for the people and on behalf of the people whom he represents in one part of Canada or the other.

When we come to the question of the length of time of speeches—and this has been a thorn in the flesh of every committee that has dealt with the subject—I personally on many occasions have thought that we could reduce the time of speaking. I know I did not have complete support from many sections of the house; nevertheless I did think that in the broad scheme of streamlining the work of the House of Commons there might perhaps be included somewhere a representation of that kind because, after all, it is much easier to make a long and windy speech such as I am making now in the house than it is to make a well-ordered, concise and effective speech like some of the others that have been made and will be made in this debate. I remember on one occasion hearing a very prominent statesman say that he had taken three days to prepare a speech which he was going to make in twelve minutes. He said: "If I were going to make a two-hour speech half an hour's preparation would be sufficient".

I now come to the part of my hon. friend's resolution that has to do with the allocation of time. I hope that he will not press this resolution, because I fancy the purpose and the objective he has in mind will be sufficiently served when his motion is debated and we are given an opportunity to discuss these matters which are of such vital interest to every commoner here. I do think the government's position particularly would be misinterpreted if one of its supporters were to press to a vote such a drastic proposal as the allocation of time in the House of Commons, because I would be forced at this stage to vote against it, and I do not like to vote against my neighbour more often than I have to.

On the question of arranging the time of the house, the hon. member mentioned the United Kingdom parliament. I hear a lot about the United Kingdom parliament, and in a good many respects I think it has served a purpose that no other democratic institution has. I remember going into the library of the United Kingdom parliament on one occasion and seeing there a plaque with a Speaker's name on it going back as far as 1277. I thought to myself, well, that is a pretty long time to be in the adventure of democracy and in the experiment of government. It is not much wonder that sometimes we, who have been a nation for only a little while, feel that we should take some of our advice from those who have been experimenting with this institution for so long. But there is one thing that my hon. friend did not mention, and which goes to the root of some of our problems, and I am not sure that any of us in the House of Commons can