

Standing Orders

If I may get back to where I was before the last interruption, I was pointing out that the hon. member for Halton made it clear in his remarks that his main desire is somehow to cut down the amount of time the opposition is taking. He showed his hand in that respect in his opening remarks, and he revealed it again two or three times during the course of his speech.

Mr. Cleaver: That is perfectly right; I admit it. I think the government supporters are entitled to as much of the time of this house as the opposition groups. I may be wrong, but that is the way I feel.

Mr. Knowles: I have no quarrel with that statement, Mr. Speaker, but the hon. member did not propose that government members be given more time. No such proposition needs to be put forward; they have the right now to take all the time they wish. What he proposed was that methods should be adopted by a majority vote of this house to place restrictions upon those who are now exercising their right of speech in this parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Knowles: Never mind saying oh, oh. I point out that each item the hon. member has placed in his omnibus resolution with the possible exception of (e), about which I will say something when I come to it, is restrictive in nature. Each proposal is an attempt to cut down the length of time to be taken by members of the opposition. That is my quarrel with this motion, that its underlying basis disregards the principle of free speech and the freedom of members of parliament to exercise their rights and their responsibilities when they come to this house. I would like hon. members to listen again to citation No. 1 in Beauchesne's third edition:

The principles that lie at the basis of English parliamentary law, as Bourinot so aptly says, are: "to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every member to express his opinion within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time—"

Mr. Cleaver: That is fair enough.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: Let me hear you say "hear, hear" to the next clause:

"—to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse."

Where are the hear, hear's now?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: Good. Similarly I ask hon. members to remember citation 818, which is

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taken from John Hatsell, a parliamentary authority of the late 18th century, who said:

"So far the maxim is certainly true and founded on good sense that as it is always in the power of the majority by their numbers to stop any improper measures proposed on the part of their opponents—"

That is right, and it should be that way. The majority should have the right to rule and the right to have the final say. But, says Hatsell, it is also true that—

"—the only weapon by which the minority can defend themselves from similar attempts from those in power are the forms and rules and proceedings which have been found necessary from time to time and are become the standing orders of the house, by a strict adherence to which the weaker party can alone be protected from those irregularities and abuses which these forms were intended to check, and which the wantonness of power is but too often apt to suggest to large and successful majorities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is one thing for the hon. member for Halton to say that it is the right of the majority to rule and to make the final decision, but it is another thing to suggest that the majority should use that power in a wanton manner to restrict the right of speech, to restrict the opportunities of members on the government side or the opposition side to participate fully in debate.

Although I shall not take time to read it because it is a lengthy one, members should read citation 20 in this same edition of Beauchesne. It appears on pages 11 and 12. In this citation Dr. Beauchesne has quoted at length from the very well known speech by Edmund Burke made to his constituents at Bristol in November, 1774. The reason I remind members about this citation, and of the quotation from Burke which is included in it, is that I believe it emphasizes the importance of every private member of any parliament—

Mr. Cleaver: Of every private member, and not just members of the opposition.

Mr. Knowles: That is exactly the point. I am going to stick with this argument for a moment and put on the record a few sentences from Edmund Burke:

But, his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These, he does not derive from your pleasure; no, nor from the law and the constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

That whole statement of Burke's, and that speech to his electors was on the point that, what was being elected to parliament was not a rubber stamp but a human being, with powers of judgment, and one whose responsibility it was to bring those powers of