

Rules of the House

Amended rule 21 agreed to.

New rule to be added after rule 21—
Speeches limited to 40 minutes.

The CHAIRMAN: My hon. friend is in order now.

Mr. IRVINE: The new rule reads as follows:

No member, except the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition, or a minister moving a government order and the member speaking in reply immediately after such minister, or a member making a motion of "no confidence" in the government and a minister replying thereto, shall speak for more than forty minutes at a time in any debate.

The suggestion I would make is that instead of merely saying that the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition should be permitted this extra time, the leader of any recognized party or group should also be included, and I would ask His Honour the Speaker to give this matter his consideration. We have in this House a number of groups; it may be that in the near future they will melt away into the two old parties; I do not know, but I hope that will not be so. Even if that happens, a change of this kind would not affect the rule, while on the other hand if these groups become well-established there is no reason why the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition should have the preference in this regard over the leader of any other group in this House. I would suggest the addition of the words, "or the leader of any recognized party or group in the House."

Mr. MARCIL: The objection I see is that there is no standard by which parties can be defined in this House. Last session I heard the hon. member for Labelle (Mr. Bourassa) declare that he was a party by himself. If that should be so, we will have sub-divisions of the Progressive party, we will have the Labour party and so on. I do not see how these parties could be recognized.

Mr. IRVINE: The word "recognized" would mean any part recognized by the Speaker as such. I do not suppose the Speaker would recognize an individual as a party, and I think there is a reasonable understanding in this regard. There is no doubt in our minds of what the word "party" means, and if the Speaker has given recognition to a group in this House, the leader of that group so recognized should be on a par with the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition in this respect.

[The Chairman.]

Mr. HEAPS: I am opposed to this rule in its entirety; I think we should follow the British practice where, as I understand it, there is no rule limiting the length of speeches. In Great Britain the budget debate is finished in two or three days; in this parliament, where our budget has not the importance of a budget in Great Britain, the discussion lasts anywhere from two to five weeks. In Great Britain this is done by an arrangement between the whips, who decide upon a certain length of time for the debate to continue. This year we had the sordid spectacle of the different whips going around insisting that the budget discussion be prolonged, and they found difficulty in finding enough speakers to continue the discussion while that debate was proceeding.

I think the regulations of the House should be as elastic as it is possible to make them, and the moment we lay down hard and fast rules we will find great difficulty in maintaining them. I think we would find some difficulty in regard to the eleven o'clock rule, and I think this forty minute rule will work a great injustice to many members of this House. In the first place we find under this rule something which I believe is novel in British procedure; it recognizes different parties in this House. I have never heard of written regulations under which different parties were recognized in the British House of Commons; there may be some such unwritten understanding as we have here, but there is nothing in the regulations to cover the point, and we are departing now from a procedure which has been long established when we recognize two groups or parties only. I would much prefer that no such recognition be given, and that we try to carry out the spirit of the rules of the House and get through our business as expeditiously as possible with no rules at all. This year we have done fairly well; there has been a desire shown in all parts of the House to not unnecessarily prolong the proceedings, and what has happened? The debate on the speech from the throne called forth practically no discussion and in spite of the fact that at times the whips found difficulty in getting enough speakers, the budget debate lasted for only about ten days. If that debate could be finished this year in ten days, is there any reason why the same thing should not apply in other years? Is there any reason why the whips of the parties could not get together and say, "The budget debate will not take more than two weeks." Is there any reason why the whips of the two parties cannot get together on the speech from the throne and get it through in a few days? The different groups of the House could