

*Hansard—Altering of Report*

What are those rules? I have here a little volume entitled "Our Hansard" which is published by Mr. William Law. In it I find this:

A third revision—

He is talking about the revisions by members that have taken place in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom.

—is given to some of the speeches. A few members of parliament come up to the sub-editors' room and look through the transcripts. They have no right to do so, but the practice of allowing members to make corrections has its beneficial side, and has been allowed to grow up because it can contribute to the accuracy of the report. The member is not allowed to make alterations in meaning unless it can be shown that the reporter has misunderstood him and he is not permitted to read the speeches made by other members. Control of this practice, under the editor, of course, is in the hands of the assistant editor, who has the power, but seldom needs to use it, to erase what a member has written. He, with his sub-editors, is thus not only the corrector but the protector of the report. It is under his authority that the transcripts are finally passed for publication.

Speakers of the house have twice been asked to give a ruling on the practice of allowing members to alter their transcripts, and they have made it clear that the limits within which the member acts are very narrow. This is the official report of the questions put to Mr. Speaker Lowther on 6th April, 1914, and of his answers:

"Mr. Ronald McNeil: I desire to ask you, Mr. Speaker, a question relating to a matter of procedure—whether you would be good enough to inform the house, for the guidance of hon. members, whether there are any restrictions on the right of members to correct the official report of speeches delivered by them in the house and in particular whether there is any unwritten rule or honourable understanding that corrections should be limited to verbal errors, and that members may not, by the insertion of words or phrases, effect material changes in the meaning of that which they actually said in the house?"

Mr. Speaker: I have consulted the editor of the official report on this matter, and he tells me that, although hon. members make corrections, he revises those corrections, and it does not follow that because an hon. member makes a correction in the proof that that correction is always accepted. I asked the editor on what principles he went, and he said that the chief principle which guided him was to obtain an absolutely correct report of what was said . . .

He is very careful not to allow any corrections which would in any way alter the general sense of the speech made, but that he does accept corrections, for instance, of faults of grammar, split infinitives, redundancies, or incorrect dates, and I have told the editor that in my opinion he is in that way acting quite correctly."

Then later on Sir William Byles asked a question:

Sir William Byles: May I ask you whether it has not long been the practice of hon. members to make slight verbal alterations in the proof which reaches them in order to make their meaning more precise and accurate?

Mr. Speaker: That might be their habit, but it rests with the editor of the official report to consider whether that amendment or alteration does materially affect the sense.

Mr. Whyte: Is it not the case that, owing to the difficulty of reporting hon. members, who usually speak in the direction away from you, the report taken of speeches in this house often omits very material sentences, and therefore, sir, it may often happen that in an important debate phrases or words are omitted or inserted which did not actually leave the lips of the speaker?

Mr. Speaker: That is so, and I have had complaints from the reporters that when hon. members, and I am sorry to add, right hon. members, turn their backs on the chair and address the benches below the gangway, it is very often very difficult to catch exactly what is said. I have given instructions in cases of that kind that it is the duty of the reporter to leave a blank if he is not able to take down the next words, and to ascertain from other sources what was said, and fill up the blank in that way.

Later on in 1944 Mr. Speaker Clifton Brown was called upon to rule upon the same subject and he reiterated the ruling made by Mr. Speaker Lowther in 1914.

That therefore is the situation in the United Kingdom and those are the rules which I think should apply in our own house. I am fortified in that view by another fact. In 1948 the standing committee on debates held meetings. I think it is the last time the standing committee on debates held meetings. Prior to that date there was a meeting I think in 1932 or 1933 and some in 1924 or 1925. But in 1948, as appears at page 490 of the *Journals* of 1947-48, I read in the report which was concurred in by the house the following, being paragraph 4:

That the pages of the daily edition be kept intact so that, after permissible corrections are made, the pages of the daily edition can be used for the bound edition as originally printed, and that—

And I draw your attention to this portion:—changes suggested by members be confined strictly to correction of errors and essential minor alterations.

To me these are the guiding rules with respect to the execution of our duties; I refer to the duties of the editor of debates, myself, the Clerk or anyone else who may have anything to do with the matter in this house.

Some hon. members may say, "If those are your views, you are far away from having observed them in dealing with the point that is now before us". I will agree that is so. The only excuse I have, if any, is this. Whereas of late hon. members have been, so far as I can ascertain, perhaps more particular than ever with respect to any changes which might be made in *Hansard*, it looks as though even in the United Kingdom, when it comes to figures, quotation or statistics, about which one may have doubt, and especially when the house is sitting in committee and not with the Speaker in the chair, more latitude has been given. Indeed, in 1924 I find that the house even considered the possibility of