

Standing Orders

Mr. Knowles: I am having the satisfaction of seeing my suggestion accepted while in the middle of making it. I thank the minister for having given us an indication of what will be the business for the next two days. I was about to say to him and to the government that in the last session or two and particularly this session some progress has been made toward this goal.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Not in the length of debates.

Mr. Knowles: Just a moment. We have made progress in that the government has acceded to requests from the opposition to arrange for particular debates. For example, we had the debate on external affairs and we are having a debate on national defence. The minister seems to think those debates were lengthy. I do not think it was out of the way to have a debate for four and one-half days on the important question of external affairs, and so far we have had only two days on national defence.

Mr. Cleaver: The debate lasted two days in Britain.

Mr. Knowles: I will get back to Britain in a little while. We have had those debates, and I believe hon. members on all sides, whatever their views, will agree they were good debates. I feel that it will save time later in the session for members to have the feeling that they had the opportunity to debate these important questions.

When you consider the matter of trying to achieve fair play and co-operation back and forth, I want to say quite frankly that it is a two-way proposition. If the government will play ball with the opposition by letting us know what their plans are, what matters are to be brought up and what debates we are to have, the opposition should not just talk for the sake of talking. But on the other hand I submit the government should not expect the opposition to close off debate just because a deadline creeps up on us, as happened with respect to the supplementary estimates last week. I say this is a two-way street. The opposition has a responsibility; but so has the government a responsibility not to crowd the house by giving us matters that have to be disposed of within too limited a space of time. As I said a moment ago, I feel we will make more progress if we have some understanding of what our program is and some planning of the work of the session. I feel we will make more progress that way than by trying to alter the various rules of the house.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): If the hon. gentleman would permit a question, would his party give us their plans for every day next week and what they intend to do?

Mr. Knowles: If we were transplanted to to the government side of the house we would do so.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): You always come up with something new.

Mr. Knowles: We will be away from here next week, but I can promise the Minister of Public Works, since he wants to know our plans, that the week after that we will make our contribution to whatever subject is before us each day, as determined by the government.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): And taking a lot of time.

Mr. Knowles: The hon. member for Halton (Mr. Cleaver) has made some specific suggestions. I have already indicated that I do not agree with them, that far from expediting the business of the house I think they would actually delay it, in that their adoption by the majority of this house would make the members of the opposition and minority groups feel that restrictions had been placed upon them. As a matter of fact, despite his attempt at one point in his speech to say he did not want to limit free debate and the right and duty of the opposition to criticize, nevertheless two or three times the hon. member showed his hand. He started right off by comparing the time taken during a previous session or two by government members and the time taken by the opposition; and he had a great deal to say about what he called the filibuster that took place during the session at the end of 1951. As the hon. member knows, I was a little annoyed at the length of a certain debate, and I tried to do something on one occasion to bring that debate to a conclusion. I regret to say I was not successful.

Mr. Cote (Matapedia-Matane): Is the hon. gentleman willing to suggest to the house that no member should speak more than once a week?

Mr. Knowles: No, I would not make any such suggestion. The fact of the matter is that members are sent here by the people of the constituencies of Canada to bring their best judgment to bear on the issues that come before the country. How people can expect to bring their judgment to bear on these issues by sitting in their seats and not saying anything is more than I can understand.