

Standing Orders

With respect to hours, I would point out that last year's committee, which sat under the chairmanship of Your Honour, recommended that the hours should be from 2.30 to six o'clock on each of the five afternoons, Monday through Friday, and from eight to ten on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

Some members on the government side have suggested that that involves too great a reduction in the number of hours from those we now sit. The present sitting hours of the house—apart from our committee and office work—amount to twenty-seven a week, and the hours I have just quoted would total only twenty-three and a half. Some members feel that is too great a reduction. I suggest as a compromise that we could reinstate the Friday evening sitting from eight to ten in the proposal made by last year's committee, and that would be a little closer to the total number of hours we now sit. As a matter of fact it would mean a loss in the total number of sitting hours of only an hour and a half a week, and I am sure we would more than make up for that if we were to adjourn at ten o'clock at night.

I am one of those who feel that we could, to the advantage of the debate and the advantage of the speeches we make, including the speeches of the hon. member for Peel (Mr. Graydon) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, reduce the length of speeches to thirty minutes, as suggested by the committee last year. I think that would be all to the good. I am one of those who feel that a change of that nature should not be forced upon the house when there is a substantial body of opinion against it, but I hope more consideration will be given to it.

The other type of suggestion that I offer for helping to streamline procedure is not in the nature of specific changes in rules. As a matter of fact I do not think you can achieve the objective of streamlining the business of the house merely by changing the rules. If you have an issue before the house about which there is feeling, over which there is contention, time is going to be taken on it no matter what rules you try to put through. What really matters if you are trying to expedite the business is that there be an understanding between the government and the opposition as to what is being proposed, and some measure of good will back and forth. I do not mean by that that the government and the opposition are going to agree on the things we are doing. We cannot agree when we are opposed to measures that are brought down, but I feel that the house could be taken into more of

the government's confidence by the government telling us a little more in advance what business it proposes to have the house discuss.

Frequent references have been made already today to practices followed in the United Kingdom. One of their practices is for the leader of the house to tell the house on Thursday of each week what the business will be for the days of the succeeding week. Here our practice for the most part is to be told at eleven o'clock at night what the business will be for the next day. I submit that is not conducive to a feeling of co-operation and good will between the two sides to the debate on any question.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Would the hon. gentleman permit a question? How can we announce a week ahead of time the business for each day of the next week when we have no limit on debates? We never fix a limit on the debate on external affairs or the debate on national defence, and I do not know when we will complete those debates. If I were to announce the business for the first week we reconvene I would probably be far from the mark.

Mr. Knowles: That is a fair question but the minister has given the answer to it. If the government were to give us an indication as to future plans a few days ahead or a week or two ahead, so that we would know what would follow the debate then in progress, I think there would be more of a disposition on the part of the opposition to move on from one debate to the other.

Some hon. Members: No, no.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): They would have to change quite a bit.

Mr. Knowles: As it is now, announcement is made of one debate at a time and we get that at eleven o'clock the night before it starts. The disposition of members is to settle down into that debate as if that is all there is.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Will the hon. gentleman permit one more question? Tonight I am going to announce that tomorrow we will continue the debate on national defence, get into committee of supply and I will call four departments. The budget will be on at eight o'clock. After the budget we will take up the Japanese treaty. Do you think the house will follow my directions?

Mr. Knowles: What will we do on Wednesday?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): We will revert to the Japanese treaty, if the debate is not concluded. Will the house follow that advice?

[Mr. Knowles.]