

*Business of the House*

citations I have given and I feel confident that they will do so knowing their interest in the matter. They will see that not only has it been the opinion of prime ministers but also of leaders of the opposition when they have occupied one side or the other during their careers, that questions before the orders of the day are called should be limited to questions of an urgent and important character and should be asked on the orders of the day only if they could not be placed on the order paper without some prejudice being suffered.

I said earlier that hon. members are moving in a direction which is contrary to that which I understand to be the right one because as hon. members know the rules are not being changed by the Speaker. If hon. members wish that the rules be changed there is a proper method to be adopted and that is to have a committee on rules, have the matter decided and have a report made to the house. Were I to receive such a report I can assure you that I would try to interpret the new rules as faithfully as I could. As it is, hon. members are trying to move in the direction of having a question period which is almost similar to that which exists in the United Kingdom without adopting the proper safeguards and without giving more authority to the Speaker to intervene whenever he feels that a question is not in order and also without adopting the method of giving notice which is in vogue in the United Kingdom.

As hon. members know in the United Kingdom there is no such thing as a question without notice. They have a question with two days' notice which is written and the answer may be either oral or written, and arising out of oral questions hon. members may put supplementary questions and it is at the discretion of the Speaker to decide what could be done with the number of supplementary questions. There is also a type of question which is known as a private notice question which is not allowed unless it is authorized by the Speaker and unless, after it has been authorized by the Speaker, notice is given to the minister who is called upon to answer, and even after this procedure has been followed with respect to an urgent question, the minister can still ask for two days' notice after private notice has been given.

Here we have these oral questions which, if I may say so, are sometimes not asked in order to obtain information but are meant to check the day to day operations of the government. According to our rules that type of question should not be asked.

Perhaps the one who has most thoroughly looked into our system of rules and who is thoroughly acquainted with the United King-

[Mr. Speaker.]

dom system is Mr. Harry W. Walker, research worker at the Institute of Local Government, Queen's University, Canada, who wrote an article in "Parliamentary Affairs" at the request of the Hansard Society, at page 461 under the heading, "Question Time in Canada" in which he said:

A specific example of a procedural device that has been developed from British practice, yet differs radically from current Westminster usage, is the question period in the Canadian House of Commons.

Then later, talking about oral questions before the orders of the day, he said:

. . . the other is sanctioned solely by custom and usage and probably would be disallowed if attempted at Westminster.

Further down he said:

The rules governing the kinds of questions that can be asked are the same for both procedures, except that questions asked before the orders of the day are called must refer to "very urgent and important matters of public concern". The definition of "urgent" questions depends upon the ruling of Mr. Speaker. Government ministers claim that too broad an interpretation of urgency is allowed by the Speaker. On the other hand, private members in opposition party ranks complain that too strict a meaning is attached to the adjective "urgent".

Then later he said:

In Canada, the complexity of the question procedure and its lack of definitiveness usually results in an annual altercation on the floor of the house.

And hon. members are witnesses to that. Then he says:

Habitually, Mr. Speaker makes a short statement—

I apologize for making mine so long.

—during the early stages of the parliamentary session to remind the members of the differences between the two procedures to be outlined below. The Speaker tries to discourage the use of too many questions being asked "on the orders of the day being called".

Mr. Walker wrote this in 1951.

Two general rules for both procedures are that all questions must seek information and there shall be no debate on the answer given. The applicable standing order and a whole line of Speakers' rulings have tended to institutionalize this mild bit of sophisticated hypocrisy inherent in the first rule. It is patent that the main reason for the asking of questions is not pure scientific or academic interest. The truth is that members want to embarrass the government ministers by making the latter reveal, in their answers, governmental ineptitude, mismanagement, and corruption—in short, to put the government party on trial.

As a matter of fact some questions are not designed to seek information from the government but are designed, as one hon. member recently pointed out to me, to "get at the government". On page 464 he refers to supplementary questions concerning which he says they are "taboo" and have been discouraged by a whole line of Speakers'