

Honourable senators, I have no fundamental objection to the conclusion that our system is working reasonably well. Yet during the course of our deliberations—and I am not quite sure how much I can disclose because of their being held *in camera*—it was said several times that “if it is not broken, don’t mend it.” I do not agree with that. I do not think that we should wait until something is broken before we mend it. I think that we should look at everything and see whether we cannot improve matters in some way.

The committee had come to the conclusion that there was no necessity to amend our rules, since we do have an opportunity to comment upon a speech in the guise of questions. Having to remember to ask a question simply to justify the intervention appears to me, at least, to be a farce. Why should we go through this sort of artificial procedure?

Hon. Charles McElman: Would the honourable senator permit a question at this stage?

Senator Godfrey: Absolutely.

Senator McElman: Senator Godfrey has quoted briefly from the *in camera* deliberations of the committee. He quoted the phrase “if it is not broken, don’t fix it,” which has a different connotation from the actual comment that was made. The comment made was to the effect that, if it works, don’t fix it.

Senator Godfrey: I am not quite sure, but my recollection was something to that effect, having read the transcript in the last couple of days. All right; if it works, don’t fix it—but if it will work better, and that is all I am saying, why not improve the procedure?

As far as I am concerned, and I have been here 12 years, it seems superfluous that a senator should rise to ask: Would the senator accept a question? The senator always replies in the affirmative, and then we carry on. I think that that is useless verbiage. I am going to establish a new principle—I am simply going to get up and ask my question. In doing that, I do not mean to be rude, but I know that he will concede to my asking a question, and I will save a little bit of *Hansard* each time I do so. I hope other honourable senators will follow the same procedure.

The second question I put to Senator Molgat had to do with the one and a half minute speech that is provided for in the rules of the House of Commons. I asked that question at the suggestion of Senator Flynn. I happened to have mentioned to him that I was going to raise these questions and I thought that, with the sponsorship of Senator Flynn, this one might have some chance of being seriously considered. However, this question had two arguments against it. One of those arguments—and I have to say that I think it is probably the only valid argument—has to do with timing. This provision would involve our Speaker in timing these speeches and, traditionally in this chamber, we have never been timed. Any honourable senator can speak as long as he wishes to. However, had we adopted this recommendation, I do not think it would be necessary to adopt the 90 second limitation as well.

The other argument against this recommendation was that the Senate has a system which differs from that of the House

of Commons; namely, that if we wish to give a speech, we give notice of an inquiry and proceed. That, however, is a cumbersome procedure. I might say that I think it would be preferable, at least on a trial basis, to do what is done in the House of Commons.

The third question that was considered was that of giving to committees the power to consider anything that comes under their purview. All of the recommendations that I have seen having to do with reform concentrate on this matter of giving to the committees more independence.

Honourable senators, as far as I am concerned, the main justification for the Senate is the committee work that it does. I really feel that we should establish a practice whereby the committees have more independence. Take, for example, the National Finance Committee, which, under the guise of considering the estimates, would investigate one department a year. That committee did not come to the Senate chamber to ask whether it could look at the Department of Manpower and Immigration or DREE—it simply went ahead and did it, and it worked. Senator Everett ingeniously thought that one out. The members of the committee discussed and decided upon which things they would take on in an investigative way. Senator Doody thought that there was something wrong with that. He took over as chairman of the subcommittee and thought that it should not proceed without a specific reference from the Senate. I must say that I prefer the way in which Senator Everett operated.

I am somewhat concerned about the public perception of the Senate. We talk a great deal about trying to improve or to reform things, but we never do anything about it. We say “So long as it is working reasonably well, okay, let’s not do anything.” That is what concerns me. We should be more willing to try to improve things and to try things out.

• (1530)

My final point is that the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders operates *in camera*. I am not a member of the committee, but I was present at the two meetings that considered this. I thought it had been agreed at those meetings that the report of the committee would contain the reasons as to why they were recommending turning down these three items. There was some discussion of the reasons that had been advanced and the fact that they should be included in the report. However, in the end—and I do not recall that the committee actually approved this—it was decided to substitute what Senator Molgat did, which was to report verbally rather than have it in the form of a comprehensive written report.

I believe it should be a matter of general practice that when a committee, meeting *in camera*, makes recommendations, those recommendations should be justified by reasons, which they usually are. I noticed that on the same day that Senator Molgat spoke, there was a report presented giving the reasons for the report. In my view, those reasons should be contained in the report and should be approved by the committee, and so on—because when Senator Molgat made his speech, he became a little confused, as he later admitted.