

House of Commons Procedures

In my opinion, the adoption of this suggestion to sit during normal meal hours would have the effect of quickly wearing out the staff. The efficiency of work of the house is the reason mentioned for this amendment. Far from increasing efficiency, it would, I think, lessen it considerably if employees became exhausted because of the extra work involved as a result of this excessive number of overtime hours as compared to normal conditions existing in private industry.

It was suggested that it would solve the problem if the debates were not taken down by the reporters during the meal hours. This solution cannot of course be considered seriously. Replacing the staff by machines, during those hours, cannot be considered seriously either. Either those machines can function efficiently and satisfactorily or they cannot. If they can, then they should be used all the time; if they cannot, there is no reason why they should be used during meal hours and not during normal sitting hours.

In essence, this would not lead to efficiency but to exhaustion. This could lead to a situation where the house would surely lose its most efficient and skilled employees; should we insist on passing this measure, employee efficiency would surely be lessened.

With respect to the French debates division, where recruiting of staff is so difficult, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, I suggest that the enforcement of this provision would result in downgrading the French debates division which is now working in a very acceptable, and I would even say, excellent way. On the one hand, new personnel cannot be recruited and, on the other hand, the staff which might remain faithfully on the job would quickly be faced with chronic exhaustion.

A much simpler solution is to keep the normal hours and also to determine the opening and adjournment periods of the house; in this way, members of the staff could fully rely on vacations which would be set beforehand.

A revision of the salaries of the house employees would also have to be seriously considered in order to put them on an equal footing with those paid for similar work in private industry. If instead of showing indifference for the well-being of employees, normal reforms were proposed, I am convinced that there would be an increase in the efficiency of the house thanks to a staff which would be reasonably paid, satisfied, able and enthusiastic.

[Mr. Martineau.]

• (4:20 p.m.)

[English]

The Deputy Chairman: Is the Committee ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Amendment (Mr. Grégoire) negatived: Yeas, 18; nays, 50.

The Deputy Chairman: I declare the amendment lost.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Chairman, I desire to say just a few words on paragraph 2, which abolishes the right of appeal from the Speaker's ruling. There is not any doubt about the fact that this right of appeal has been abused by using it to get the view of the House on the substance of what is before the House, rather than on the actual ruling of the Speaker. But the fact that this right has been abused does not warrant abolishing it completely, any more than we would abolish many of the other rules that are abused from time to time by Members of the House.

• (4:30 p.m.)

I have two basic objections to this complete abolition of the right of appeal. The first is that there is always a danger of bias on the part of the Speaker and, even if there is not actual bias, there is always the danger that Members may feel the Speaker is biased in favour of the Government by whom he is nominated. Moreover the history of Canadian parliamentary life has been that the Speakership has often been a stepping stone from a private Member's position to a Cabinet Minister's portfolio. Because of that fact the Speakership has not been thought of as having that degree of impartiality that would free the Chair from any feeling that there was bias on the part of its occupant.

The suggestion has been made that appeals could be abolished if we had a permanent Speaker. The right hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour have each talked about the idea of a permanent Speaker, and even names have been tossed around, I think somewhat unwisely. No one to date has spelled out what the Government or the Official Opposition means when they talk about a permanent Speaker. The Minister of Labour went so far as to ask the different political parties to express their views about the acceptability of a certain individual as a possible permanent Speaker. I hope before this debate concludes that someone on behalf of the Government, preferably the Prime Minister, will tell the House exactly what is