

Government Orders

Let me read, as an example, the very last standing order, number 159, written in 1867.

It is the duty of the officers of this House to complete and finish the work remaining at the close of the session.

This rule came about because employees of the House were only engaged for the few months when members were in Ottawa, having arrived on horse-back, by boat, or by train.

Life has become far more complicated. People across this nation now have instantaneous information, via television broadcasting, and the staffing requirements in the House in this modern electronic age mean that specialization and dedication are full time requirements.

[*English*]

Some may have the opinion that we would all be better off if we had never heard, say for three months, what actually transpired in the House of Commons. That, of course, is not possible. We cannot go back as we move away from the agrarian age through to today's electronic age of information towards the 21st century in eight and a half years. We see a need to change the rules.

[*Translation*]

Indeed, this package of rule changes is one which has taken over 18 months to negotiate among all parties. It was outdated before we even adopted it, because we did not cover all the changes to be covered. Standing Order 158 says that, if the sergeant at arms takes someone into custody, that person cannot be released until a fine of \$4.00 is paid to the sergeant at arms. Again, a rule from the nineteenth century. We are gradually modernising our rules, and, with or without the cooperation of the members opposite, we will continue to bring this House into the modern age.

[*English*]

Mr. Bourinot began the process of codifying our rules. He was followed by others and today, we use, as our reference, the sixth edition of Beauchesne for our rules, precedents, examples and expectations. I cannot, for instance, call the hon. member opposite an ass or a donkey. These are unparliamentary terms. Members of the equine family, small size, may not get approval either. I cannot even compliment the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands on his dress. All these con-

straints are codified by our Standing Orders and Beauchesne.

[*Translation*]

Now let me come to the present set of proposals, Mr. Speaker. I would especially like to explain several of these proposed changes in detail.

As a first example, let me quote Standing Order 37(3). This rule relates to the provision of answers to questions by members. If a member is able to get on the priority list to be able to ask a question and the member is not happy with the answer, the member can appeal to the Speaker for an elaboration.

I won't read the entire rule, but the important proposal is the new sentence we want to add to 37(3). I will read this—

Unless previously disposed of, the said notice shall be deemed withdrawn after the forty-fifth sitting day from the day of notice.

Mr. Speaker, with the present rule, a member could give notice today about unhappiness with an answer and ask the Speaker for it to be considered for a fuller answer. This process is called the late show and usually 3 requests are chosen, to be dealt with in the 30 minutes after the close of daily business.

• (1720)

Now, that sounds okay. But the reality is that these requests can languish on the list for a day, a week, a month or, Mr. Speaker, up to two years. This is absurd. The honourable member has probably completely forgotten about the request or the topic has become irrelevant. Obviously, the system needs changing.

The new proposal suggest that, if a late show question cannot be dealt with within 45 sitting days, and I emphasize that this is still more than 2 months, then the issue is dropped in favor of a more topical question.

[*English*]

That is quite a reasonable proposal, Mr. Speaker. This is only one of a negotiated 64 proposed changes. They were negotiated with the members of the opposition and our members, negotiated, examined and refined by procedural experts in the House. These have been examined in fine detail by platoons of lawyers, politicians and procedural clerks.