

*Standing Orders*

The previous speaker, the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Bradette), has stated that eventually we shall be obliged to amend the rules of this house because of the criticism of the public. I think there has been criticism by the public for many years. In fact, I am informed that it was the late J. W. Dafeo who described a parliamentary debate as that vast repository of talk. We have had various criticisms of the way in which the business of this house has been conducted. Some lengthy sessions have become longer and longer. It is my opinion that these sessions have been extended because of the length of the speeches that have been delivered in the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) made the statement this afternoon, or implied, that a member was not doing his duty unless he spoke at great length in the House of Commons. To my mind that is not the sole duty of a member of the House of Commons. As has been said by the hon. member for Cochrane, there is correspondence, departmental work, and many other things in the riding that have to be taken care of. I believe that the people of our constituencies—and I have talked to many of them—expect their business to be conducted in an efficient manner and with dispatch. They wish action and a great deal less verbiage in the house. I do not know whether hon. members are aware of the fact that by June of 1952 this parliament will have been elected three years. Out of the three years or thirty-six months that we shall have been elected, we shall have spent in session in Ottawa twenty-five months. Out of the thirty-six months we have had the opportunity to be at home for only eleven months.

It seems to me that the business of a member of parliament is not confined solely to debates in the House of Commons. I think a member has an obligation to get out about his riding and find out what is going on in the particular constituency that he represents. The way that we are going on in this house, we are apt to be living in an ivory tower in Ottawa out of touch with the common people who elect us and send us here to do their business. It is about time we had the opportunity to return to our home constituencies for a portion of each year, when we would have an opportunity to go out on the highways and by-ways of our constituencies and talk to the people and get an idea of what they know and what they feel about the issues that are being discussed here in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Gibson:** They are not so dumb.

**Mr. Cavers:** I agree that the business of government has become more complicated in

[Mr. Cavers.]

the last twenty years, but it is not necessary to prolong debate in order that we may have a reasonably lengthy session. People in Canada are concerned because we cannot finish the business of the country in a five-month session and we are obliged to have two sessions each year. I wish to quote an excerpt from a recent editorial in the *Ottawa Journal*, which reads as follows:

Every member of parliament knows well that there is atrocious waste of time in parliament, debates which sensibly could be confined to a day are dragged on through weeks in complete futility.

Of course there is such a thing as freedom of speech. No one in this house denies the right of freedom of speech to those members who are elected to do the country's business; but as I have seen parliament in action, I am convinced that there is a repeated and persistent abuse of that privilege. Freedom unbridled may become licence. That is why I say I commend the hon. member for Halton for the resolution which he has placed before us tonight. I think there is a great deal of merit in that part of his resolution which limits the time of speeches in the debate on the speech from the throne, in the budget debate and in any other particular debate.

No hon. member need feel that he will not have an opportunity of expressing himself in this house. I have yet to see the time when any hon. member has been refused the right to speak during any of the debates, and I believe that would continue if a limited time were placed on each debate. Then, I think the time of speaking could be reduced from forty minutes to twenty minutes. When I was a law student some years ago, I recall very well a lecture by a former member of this House of Commons, and an eminent counsel, Mr. Arthur G. Slaght, Q.C. Mr. Slaght on that occasion told members of the class that it was impossible for the average speaker to be able to hold the attention of any group, particularly a jury, for more than half an hour. I am sure there are few members in this House of Commons who can hold the interest of the House of Commons for longer than twenty minutes, and do it successfully. Therefore I congratulate the hon. member for Halton. I hope that this resolution will come to a vote, and that it will receive the support of the majority of the members of the House of Commons.

**Mr. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops):** Mr. Speaker, it has been said that soul-searching and self-confession have certain advantages. Indeed I remember an occasion—I think it was just at the spring session of last year—when somebody who perhaps was not over-charitable said that the Senate had never discussed anything so intelligently as when