

Standing Orders

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to admit frankly at once that I do not claim to have any profound knowledge of the standing orders or of the rules of debate. In 1951 the house was in session for eight months. A check of *Hansard* discloses that if members on the government side of the house had taken up as much time as members of the opposition groups—

Mr. Noseworthy: Why should they?

Mr. Cleaver: —we would not have finished the work of the house in twelve months. One would have thought that after being in session for eight months the house could have completed its work in an orderly fashion in time for hon. members who live some distance from Ottawa to be home with their families at Christmas. But on the Thursday before Christmas twenty-seven members of the Conservative opposition—the total membership of that group is less than one-fifth the total membership of the house—apparently made up their minds that that was not going to happen. Because of three succeeding amendments to a procedural motion—which by the way if introduced in the house at Westminster by a minister of the crown is carried without any amendment being permitted and without any debate—the house spent all of that Thursday discussing what hours we would work on Thursday.

Mr. Fulton: The procedural motion was not introduced by a minister in that case.

Mr. Sinnott: You will get your chance.

Mr. Cleaver: I will let any hon. member follow me who wants to split hairs on niceties. I am just interested in the broad general lines and am giving the reasons for introducing this resolution.

To me the only thing which that Thursday before Christmas clearly demonstrated was the fact that our rules are urgently in need of amendment. Under the rules of the house there was nothing at all to prevent a similar performance the next day and the day after.

Mr. Fraser: That was the government's fault.

Mr. Cleaver: While it is a primary and cardinal rule that the opposition has the duty and the right to discuss thoroughly and to criticize all government measures, I suggest that there is one rule much more important than that, a rule which must be followed if in the final analysis we are to continue as a democracy—the right of the majority to rule.

Mr. Hodgson: With an iron hand and with a steamroller behind you.

Mr. Cleaver: The British House of Commons has a membership over twice as large as ours and serves a population four times that of Canada. I think it is an understatement to say that in Great Britain they have problems of government quite as difficult and as important as our own, but notwithstanding that fact, by an orderly procedure and certain other features of their standing orders and rules of debate they are able to perform their task in much less time.

A three-way exchange took place on March 5 last which I think headlines in a few words what I want to say. I quote from page 136 of *Hansard* as follows:

Mr. Drew: I say this with the utmost seriousness. The laughter of hon. members in regard to this matter merely indicates that they have overlooked the fact that the House of Commons at Westminster, which we follow to a considerable extent, has no time limit on speeches; but because of the planning of debates, and the indication ahead as to when the debates are to take place, it is able to do the extremely important business which is carried on there in a much shorter time than we do ours.

Mr. Claxton: Because it has a timetable.

Mr. Whitman: There are no filibusters there.

The house at Westminster is able to do the extremely important business which is carried on there in a much shorter time than we do ours. We have the reason.

Mr. Claxton: Because it has a timetable.

Then the hon. member for Notre Dame de Grace (Mr. Whitman) gives us one of the causes for the great delay which takes place in this house. He says:

There are no filibusters there.

I hope the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) will not change his mind. I hope he meant what he said—

Mr. Sinnott: He is not here today.

Mr. Cleaver: —and I hope he will support—

Mr. Fraser: He is here today.

Mr. Cleaver: —this resolution. I have purposely drafted my resolution in terms wide enough to permit any and every member of the house who wishes to do so to give his views as to ways and means by which our debating practice can be improved. The first paragraph of my resolution is very general in its terms. Then I follow with five amendments which I suggest. You, Mr. Speaker, and the members of the house have heard the leader of the Conservative opposition, the leader of the C.C.F. party (Mr. Coldwell) and many other members comment favourably from time to time on the practice at Westminster. Therefore I took the trouble to read the British *Hansards*, and I hope the house will bear with me while I put on the record under broad headings what takes place