

Standing Orders

This is not a new problem, and it is perhaps difficult to find a solution. I think we have to recognize the fact that fairly long sessions have to be held in the governing of the country of Canada. During the period when our population was about 5½ million, members of the house were spending five months engaged in their duties here. Now that the population is 14 million, five to six months seem essential. There are means of shortening the session, by using some of the rules which are established such as under special circumstances the moving of the previous question and the imposition of closure, if there is an obvious obstructionist move on.

If government business were brought down earlier in the session it would be helpful. If contentious legislation were brought forward earlier in the session, that again would be helpful; but generally I think it is a matter of arrangement and consultation among the various parties in the house. It has been obvious that, since the war, sessions have extended in length. This has been the practice in England. The House of Commons there and here find themselves sitting longer since the war than before. That is due in this country, as in England, to the development of the so-called welfare state, greater government interest in general affairs of the people, and the tremendous burden that is placed upon us by our difficulties in international affairs.

I would suggest that the hon. member who has introduced this legislation should reconsider the matter. I think that throughout it is aimed at the restriction of debate in this house, and that by arrangement and consultation between the parties many of our problems can be solved. We do not want to be forced into the position where stringent rules are applied, restricting in any way the liberties and privileges that have been built up in the House of Commons over many hundreds of years. It has been a slow process; it has stood the test of time. We can make the necessary adjustments here and there that will solve some of our problems, but I think we must recognize the fact, whether we like it or not, that the sessions, in order to conduct the nation's business, will have to be fairly lengthy.

I cannot say that I am enamoured of this particular type of life, but having put our hands to the plow we must stay with it until somebody decides that we should be retired. Under these circumstances, I think we must give our attention to the nation's business. I have noticed this. The very people who say, parliament talks too much, and it takes too much time, will be the very ones to

[Mr. Churchill.]

criticize, if something is missed by parliament. They will be the first ones to say: No one raised his voice in the House of Commons, with regard to such and such a measure which went through in the dying days of the session. You cannot have it both ways. Either you must permit full debate, full discussion and full investigation of the business of the government, and you must devote the time to it, or else it would be simply a matter of assenting to most of the propositions that are put before us without investigation and without that close attention that surely is required from people placed in the responsible positions in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Maurice Boisvert (Nicolet-Yamaska): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my remarks I should like to commend the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Cleaver) for having introduced today an important resolution with respect to parliamentary rules and procedures. I am not yet as familiar with the intricacies of those rules and procedures as is the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), so I will confine myself to some general observations about this subject, that is to say, what could be done and what should be done to improve our parliamentary system.

No one can contest the right of this house to arrange and rearrange its procedures to fit the purpose of a sound and full discussion of the problems which have to be met efficiently by this parliament. The modernization of procedure is already an old question which has been debated in Great Britain and in Canada for many decades. Some improvements have been concurred in during the course of events which have taken place in this country. I do not want to use much of the time of this house but I should like to show that, in 1927, this parliament had been studying this question; and from the beginning of the century up to 1949 some improvements had been brought in. One of those improvements is standing order 37 which limits the speeches of members to forty minutes. The question that we should ask ourselves today is this: Is it possible again to reduce the time allowed to members for the discussion of issues brought before us, or are those issues so wide in importance that we cannot make up our minds within thirty minutes—

Mr. Cruickshank: Ten minutes.

Mr. Boisvert:—and bring, before this house, ample considerations which would help this chamber to take a proper decision? Let me quote the Speaker of that time, the Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux, who was elected