

Standing Orders

democratic process. To suggest that they should be lightly set aside is, in my view, open to question. I know of occasions in the time that I have been here when there has been before the house a measure that seemed agreeable to everyone, and so we have been asked, by unanimous consent, to suspend the rules and to go through two, three, four, five, six or seven stages in one day. I remember in particular the bill with respect to re-establishment credits which was introduced toward the end of world war II. That was a measure that we were all anxious to support. It was introduced toward the end of the session, and the late Mr. King suggested that inasmuch as we were all in favour of it, perhaps we could let it go through all its stages in one day.

For anyone to suggest that we should stick to the rules seemed a bit out of place in that particular atmosphere, and so it was permitted to go through. Within the next two or three days, however, we began to get public comment as to some shortcomings in that legislation; but we no longer had the opportunity to express any of those views on the floor of this house because we had by-passed the usual procedure and had put the bill through all its stages in the one day. I think that if, on that occasion, one hon. member had felt that the conscience of the house should be pricked a bit and if he had said, "No; I think that at least one of these stages should stand over for another day", it would have been better. In that event those views which people had and which they communicated to us a few days later could have been expressed on the floor of this house. I mention that as one example. There are others that have taken place since I have been here. I mention that one in particular because that is one of the rules, the suspension of which is so often requested.

I can agree that in many cases it seems unnecessary to wait for another day, we will say, for third reading of a bill for which there is general support. But what happens here is that if we let third readings go time after time without waiting for the next day, it becomes almost a practice of the house; and then anyone who wants to hold it up is told that is no longer the practice of this House of Commons. It is that sort of thing that makes me suggest that we should be extremely careful about changing the rule with respect to unanimous consent. I do not think we should agree that anything has unanimous consent unless it actually has unanimous consent, and that rule should apply very definitely with regard to the standing orders of this house.

I conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, on this note. I simply want to say that I feel

[Mr. Knowles.]

that there are improvements that could be made in our rules and in our procedure. At the opening part of my remarks I suggested some of the changes that I thought should be made. I have spoken in particular of the hours of sitting, of the length of speeches, and of planning the work of the session. I think we have made some progress; and I think that the reason we have done so is that we have had so many committees on house procedure. I know that some of those who have been on those committees feel frustrated; they feel that we meet for hours on end and that we do not make much progress. The fact of the matter is, however, that we talk these matters out and we reach some agreements and those agreements get reflected in the way the business of this house is conducted.

I think we should continue to attempt to improve the rules of this house and to improve the procedure of this house in that way. I do not think we should try to do it by means of a motion of this kind coming before the house, being voted on and being passed by the majority of the house against the will of a substantial minority. After this discussion has taken place—and there is no doubt as to the value of the discussion, whatever our various opinions may be—I hope the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Cleaver) will consent that the motion be adjourned or that it be postponed to another day and that he will leave to the committee method the whole question of trying to improve the rules of the house on the basis of good will and co-operation rather than on the basis of the majority using its power to introduce restrictive changes which would defeat their own purpose.

Mr. Victor Quelch (Acadia): Mr. Speaker, I believe that members on all sides of the house agree that certain changes should be made in the standing orders. In regard to this question that appears to be the only point upon which there is any unanimity. But the minute you start to discuss any changes, you then get a multitude of different views; and few members appear to be willing to compromise on their stand. I think that fact is borne out by what has happened in the various select committees that have been set up during the past few years to deal with the question.

Last year a special committee was set up to bring down recommendations as to ways and means of expediting the business of the house. That committee had before them the experience of what had happened on former occasions, and they therefore hoped to bring down some worth-while recommendation. They realized that the only chance of getting a recommendation from the committee was