

Standing Orders

My point is this. If you are having estimates generally referred to committees, would you expect the answers to questions to be given by departmental officials or to be given through the ministers?

Mr. Graydon: I think the government whip will admit that we have had some experience in the committee on external affairs. It has worked out in this way: We usually have the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson) attending in the committee for one, two or three days. I think you can always count on the departmental officials sticking up for themselves and when a question concerning policy is asked they will always say that that is a matter for the minister. I cannot think of any instance where we got into trouble in the committee on external affairs in that regard. I thank the hon. member for bringing up this question because it gave me an opportunity to refer to the only experience we have had along these lines. I am simply suggesting that it might be adopted in connection with other estimates.

I am satisfied that there are many other things that can be done in connection with streamlining the rules. When I got up I had no intention of making a speech anywhere near as long as that made by the hon. member for Essex West (Mr. Brown), but I do want to express some of the things that have been revolving in my mind in connection with house work. We hear a lot about the limitation of speeches and procedure in connection with rulings by Mr. Speaker. I think things are much better now than they were, but one thing we do still have is long-winded statements by ministers of the crown at the opening of the house. When such a statement is made and another hon. member gets up to reply he is likely to be ruled out of order. If it were not for the great leniency and wisdom and discerning judgment of His Honour I suppose we would have to be silent after these long statements are being made.

At first I was quite innocent about these statements. I used to think that just before a minister left his office something urgent had come up about which he had to make a statement. But then I noticed that quite often a minister would appear jittery and nervous if he did not get in his statement on the order for motions fairly early. Then I would look up in the press gallery and I would see the sheets flying around and would realize that copies of the statement had been sent to the press before it was given to the House of Commons.

That sort of thing could develop into a species of insidious propaganda. It is an

[Mr. Weir.]

important duty of the opposition to see that it does not go as far as that. I must say that the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) is not a great offender in that regard. When he is, we always tell him about it. I think these long-winded statements on the part of the government should be made short and to the point. More than that, I do not think any manoeuvres or conspiracies should be indulged in with backbenchers. I am only imagining this, but I can hear a minister saying to a backbencher, "I am going to get into trouble if I make a statement on the orders of the day because the opposition will object; how would you like to ask me a question and then nobody can say anything if I give a long answer?" That has been done although I have always been innocent enough to believe that the minister and the member had never had any previous communication.

This is the sort of thing I want to mention because this is the sort of thing that disturbs the House of Commons. I am hopeful that this lecture—for which I am not charging anything—will be taken in good part by those who need it most. As a matter of fact, some of those on the government benches who need it most are out of the chamber while some of those who need it least are present.

The hon. member for Halton (Mr. Cleaver) will think that I have rambled a long way from his resolution but I think he will understand that it provides a broad vehicle for discussion in a frank and open manner. The hon. member made reference to the reading of speeches. I am afraid my thinking is not very orthodox in this connection. I would rather have a 15-minute speech read from a manuscript than listen for 30 or 40 minutes to a speech which had not been prepared, such as the one I am making.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Graydon: I remember when I first came to the house I was told that I should be able to speak on my feet without having to look anywhere except across at the other benches. I have always tried to do that, but it is a rather hard rule to follow. At times statements must be made by members of the government or members of the opposition in which questions of policy may be decided by one or two words. I think we have to use common sense in this sort of thing. I have never objected to ministers using rather extensive notes when they are dealing with questions of policy. I have spoken on external affairs on occasion and I have felt it necessary to have extensive notes or perhaps to quote partly from a speech that I had had typewritten.