

Standing Orders

I pointed out that the resolution before us, at least in so far as four of its points are concerned, is definitely restrictive. Their aim is to set up a system whereby this house, by a majority vote, would determine that certain debates would last for only a certain length of time. The result of that, Mr. Speaker, is inevitable. The result would be that in some of those debates there would be hon. members who wished to speak but would not have an opportunity to do so. They might be members of the opposition; they might be members of the government side of the house. I contend that members who are sent here should have the right to speak on issues that come before the house, if they wish to do so, and that is why I oppose the hon. member's proposal.

I have no objection to any changes in the rules that are agreed upon by the house as a whole which are fair to all and equal in their application to all members. But a set of rules like these would not be equal in their application. These rules, if put into effect, would result in some members having the right to take part in certain debates, and other members being denied that right.

If I may come back to Burke's statement again, I suggest that the constituents in every part of Canada send their members here to bring their best judgment to bear on the issues before this house, and that the electors in every constituency have a right to expect that their member will have the right to speak if he wishes to do so. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, for that reason, I feel that the house should not entertain the first four proposals in the motion put forward by the hon. member for Halton.

As I have said, there are frequent references to the practices at Westminster, and there are many things at Westminster that we would do well to follow; but I submit, as Dr. Beauchesne and Dr. Fauteux have pointed out, there are vast differences between that country and this. We have to develop procedures and ways of doing things that fit appropriately the Canadian situation.

One of the proposals that are before us is (c):

For the limiting to one half hour of the debate on all procedural motions and underlying amendments.

Mr. Sinnott: That is long enough for anyone.

Mr. Knowles: The hon. member for Springfield says: "That is long enough for anyone." I think the hon. member misunderstands paragraph (c). Paragraph (c) does not say that speeches should be reduced to thirty minutes. If it said that I would agree with it. What paragraph (c) says is that the total time taken by all the members of this house

on a procedural matter shall be limited to thirty minutes. Mr. Speaker, I might take that long myself, and no one else would get a chance.

Mr. Sinnott: No, you are wrong.

An hon. Member: Don't we know it.

Mr. Knowles: I was hoping that there would be some comment, and I hear there is. Mr. Speaker, it is true that the important debates in this house are on matters of substance, not on procedure, but there are times when a point of procedure and procedural proposals can be extremely important in their bearing on the rights and privileges of the members of parliament, and to suggest that in no case should a debate on a procedural motion last more than a half hour is, I suggest, unduly restrictive of the rights and the privileges of hon. members.

The other points (a), (b) and (d) are related to debates in various ways, but all have as their aim the limiting to a certain definite period of time all the debate that can take place in this house. If such a limitation could be brought about debate by debate as it comes along, by agreement in the house, I am all for it, but to lay it down as a rule, passed by a majority vote of this house, will not expedite the business of the house; it will annoy those who are frozen out by such a measure, and you will actually have the debate increased and the length of the session increased by time being taken on other items.

I said earlier that I would say a word with regard to subparagraph (e) which reads:

For the requirement that at least four members should rise in their seats to express opposition for a request for unanimous consent to a suspension of the rules, otherwise unanimous consent of the house to be presumed when requested.

There are those who regard that as a plausible suggestion. I think it is one to be looked at very carefully. What it suggests is that we should make it easier to suspend the rules of the house. It is now possible, Mr. Speaker, to suspend any rule of this house in the proper manner, by notice being given, that notice appearing on the order paper and it coming up after the required forty-eight hours' notice. What this motion would suggest would be that that procedure could be got around, and that at any time the house could be asked to suspend any of its rules, provided that there were fewer than four members who did not object. Well, that raises the whole question as to whether it is a good idea to suspend rules. Rules are established by a parliament like this because we believe they are a proper way to carry on our business. They are sanctioned by long usage and by all the traditions of our