

House of Commons Procedures

Mr. McIlraith: It is just a matter of which way is most convenient to the Committee. I am quite satisfied to do it whatever way the Committee wishes; I would just like their guidance on the point. I do not want to be in the position of being accused of not moving an amendment to the resolution that I have undertaken to move.

Mr. Churchill: Unless the amendments are moved the guillotine may fall later on and prevent them.

Mr. McIlraith: This is why we were very careful before we started this discussion to point out that there is one resolution only before the Committee.

Mr. Knowles: You could have had them all read by now.

Mr. McIlraith: Yes.

Mr. Churchill: You can read them, but not move them.

Mr. McIlraith: Then I would be out of order. Mr. Chairman, I move, seconded by the Solicitor General:—

Mr. Knowles: You don't need a seconder.

Mr. McIlraith:

That Section (5) of the proposed Standing Order 39 be amended by adding after the words "not exceeding 30 minutes", where they appear at the end of the first paragraph thereof, the words "except on Mondays when the time allowed for a question period prior to the calling of Orders of the Day shall not exceed one hour".

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Chairman, the amendment here—I do not mean the one about the question period of one hour on Monday, but the whole philosophy behind curtailing the question period—is really not a very bad step on the part of the Government and will only cut in half the time that is now largely a period of questions of questionable order. I do not think it is going to sharpen question time. I had hoped that the Government would really take a bold step here and move to the British system, where notice of all questions is given, and where Parliament does not expect the chief minister, the Prime Minister, to be there each day. I think he is on duty, so to speak, on Tuesdays only. I really think it is a tragedy that we have been so timid about this.

• (9:10 p.m.)

Unless there is a drastic bringing to order of the type of questions asked, it is my submission that all we are going to do is to cut in half, or if today is any example cut

[Mr. McIlraith.]

by two thirds, a period which has largely been spent on asking questions of local interest which have no national importance. I am as guilty, I confess, as anybody else in this; we all become accustomed to bad habits and share in breaching the rules.

I think this is one place where we might pay tribute, as was done yesterday, to the former Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton West. A lot of people thought he was very tough. I thought he ran a very good show here, as a matter of fact.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

An hon. Member: We would expect you to applaud that one.

Mr. Fairweather: I have never felt I had to applaud all Tories; that would be of no particular advantage. But I urge the Government to re-establish the Committee on Organization and Procedure and reform the question period. This measure will not do that at all.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, this is the first time I have spoken in this debate on procedure to any large extent because I recognize, as do most hon. Members of the House, that as the business of parliament becomes more involved and parliament is called upon by circumstances to take a more active role in directing the affairs of the country, unless Members of Parliament are to spend 12 months a year here we must have a great deal more direction in the work of parliament and a great deal more allocation of time than we have had in previous years.

The fact is, of course, that more time spent here will be taken up by Ministers of the Crown and the frontbenchers of each of the parties. Those of us who are backbenchers will take up less time and will have less opportunity to express our points of view. I think that anyone who thought about this change realized this from the beginning, but I think we accepted it because we realized there was no alternative if the business of parliament is to be done.

I have no objection to a limitation of the time devoted to question period, although I am skeptical that we will save very much time. I am not going to make any specific proposals for more changes to the rules because it seems to me there comes a time when you reach a point of diminishing returns; but it does seem to me that unless there is a different approach to the question period, with a half hour question period there