

House of Commons Procedures

sible number of members out of the house so as to be able, often, to pass measures they want adopted fast but which deserve discussion. The government would take advantage of the absence of a number of members who would be out to eat. That may not be of great importance for a party with 100 or 120 members, although it should not be so, for it is just another opportunity or reason for a member to be absent for two or three hours during lunch or dinner.

On the other hand, if two or three members of our group are on a delegation, and if two or three of us are out eating, there will not be enough left to call a vote, because we must be at least five for that. If there are not five of us present, the government will do as it pleases. It is intended that we should sit during lunch and dinner, thus removing us from the house at all costs, so as to pass quickly legislation which often affects our localities and in respect of which we shall not have the occasion to defend the interests of our ridings.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that the government wishes to increase the sitting hours, but there are many other ways of doing so without depriving us of our meal hours.

Let us simply take an hour for lunch or dinner, instead of two hours or two hours and a half; let us work in the morning, let us work on Wednesday night. As long as we are in Ottawa, let us have regular working hours, but let us not be deprived of time for meals and rest. I perceive something mean in this amendment to the rules, and I am surprised that not a single member of the opposition should have spoken on this matter. I do not know whether they prefer to skip out for an hour or an hour and a half in order to eat while the house is sitting, but I frankly admit this is very difficult, for I feel that we are here not to let legislation go by without debate, but rather to discuss it. While the house sits, our duty is to be present to debate our problems, to try to pass the reforms put forward by the government and to adopt legislation to the needs of our constituencies.

That is why we should be present in the house instead of resting or eating. The right to eat is sacred and a member could not be blamed for leaving his seat in order to take his meal. That means the government must change its attitude concerning this provision and allow us at least one hour for meals, even though we may have to make up for it on Wednesday nights or in the mornings. No one

will convince me that it is impossible to find 40 hours outside of mealtime. Come now. I notice that on the same day, we will take the four hours formerly set aside for meals, and that we will work during mealtime. For me, as for many others, that is nonsensical. Let us decide on other hours, let us shorten the mealtime but let us be allowed to be present when the house sits, without depriving us of our right to three meals a day.

Some hon. Members: The vote.

Mr. Martineau: Mr. Chairman, I have a few comments to make on one of the questions dealt with by the hon. member for Roberval (Mr. Gauthier) who preceded me. It relates to paragraph 3 (1) of the resolution before us.

The previous speaker said that members should not be deprived of their lunch hours. The suggestion surely has merits, but I think it is cause for more concern, not particularly for the inconvenience it would cause to the members themselves—we know they can leave the house whenever they please, although this is not recommended—but to the staff of the house who cannot leave at will; I think that in suggesting sitting during lunch hours, insufficient thought has been given to the staff.

We have in this chamber interpreters, reporters, the clerk and his assistants, not to mention Your Honour, who must remain on duty during our long sitting hours. In my opinion, not only will this proposal affect the personnel, but it is quite inhuman. Labour unions would never allow private enterprise to deprive their members of normal meal hours. And now it is proposed that employees who have an exacting, delicate and very strenuous job to perform should stay at it during long hours and even give up their meal hours.

As I say, such a proposal runs counter to social justice and I have no hesitation in calling it inhuman and antisocial.

Mr. Chairman, if such conditions would not be tolerated within private industry, can the government indulge in the luxury or even have the gall to lay down for its staff labour conditions it would not allow in private industry?

Since the government has the responsibility to implement normal labour standards, and since it would not allow private industry to apply such labour conditions, I appeal specially to it to change its proposal so that every employee of this house can have normal meal hours. It is a fact that one may answer: