

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, January 17, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

• (1105)

[*English*]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

OPERATION OF EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Madam Speaker: As Hon. Members know, a number of new procedures become effective today for an experimental period of one year.

There are two areas in particular where the discretion of the Chair will be a significant element in the successful operation of the provisional rules. The first of these areas is a fundamental one which will directly affect the debating practices of the House. The introduction of a ten-minute period during which questions may be asked and comments made concerning the speech of the Hon. Member who has just spoken is likely to bring about a radical change in the way in which our debates are conducted. These ten-minute periods will be available to Members during most key debates, including those on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the Budget, allotted days and the second and third readings of Bills.

The second area is the procedure, provided for in provisional Standing Order 21, which will enable Hon. Members other than Ministers to make statements of not more than one and a half minutes on matters of concern. A period of not more than 15 minutes has been provided for this purpose preceding the Question Period. This procedure has replaced the former Standing Order 43 and will operate in quite a different way. It is intended to provide Hon. Members on all sides with an opportunity to voice serious issues of international, national or local concern. The element of "urgent and pressing necessity", which was theoretically a requirement under former Standing Order 43 and which was not particularly applied, has been removed. There will be no need to move a motion and the unanimous consent of the House will not be required in order to make a statement. That statement will last exactly one and a half minutes and the Speaker will interrupt any Member who goes beyond that time.

I do apologize in advance because I know it is hard for Hon. Members to know exactly what you can say in 90 seconds. I know that very well because I was trained on television and radio to say very important things in a very short period of time. It will take time for Hon. Members to get used to that and I apologize ahead of time, but I will interrupt everyone when 90 seconds have elapsed.

[*Translation*]

Since the application of these two rules of procedure will be largely left to the discretion of the Chair, I would like to inform the House of the general guidelines I intend to follow, unless the House should indicate otherwise.

First, a few words about the ten-minute question-and-answer period. During those ten minutes, the Chair will try, as much as possible, to give priority to Members representing a party other than that of the Member who made the speech. However, backbenchers on the Government side will also be entitled to ask questions following a speech by a Minister. The Chair will cut off any questions that are likely to be too long. Questions should be just that, and not speeches. If I may be allowed to give Hon. Members some advice, the shorter the question, the greater the element of surprise, and the easier it is to make things difficult for the Member to whom the question is directed. In my opinion, the best questions are short, but of course, Hon. Members must be the judge of that. In any case, the Chair will not allow Members to use this period to make speeches. Only questions will be allowed.

Furthermore, the ten-minute period should not be monopolized or almost monopolized by one and the same Member. The ten minutes are to be used for debate between a number of Members sitting in the House during this time. The period is to be reserved for questions and comments about the speech preceding this period. I believe that in this connection, the Chair will probably have to take a stricter approach as far as the principle of relevance is concerned. The Chair has always been fairly flexible in this respect, but when only ten minutes are allowed for debate, it is clear that both the questions and the speech itself must be relevant in the strict sense of the word. Questions will therefore have to be concise and preferably consist of one sentence. Need I add that questions should not be preceded by a long preamble.

The Chair will try to recognize as many Members as possible and will give the Member whose speech is the subject of questions or comments an opportunity to answer, as they are put, all questions raised during this ten-minute period but it may be more practical, for instance, to have the Member answer all questions during the last two minutes. In any case, we shall have to experiment a bit with the new procedure before we know exactly what the best solution is for all Members.

Now a few words about the guidelines I intend to follow with respect to Members' Statements. As far as possible, the