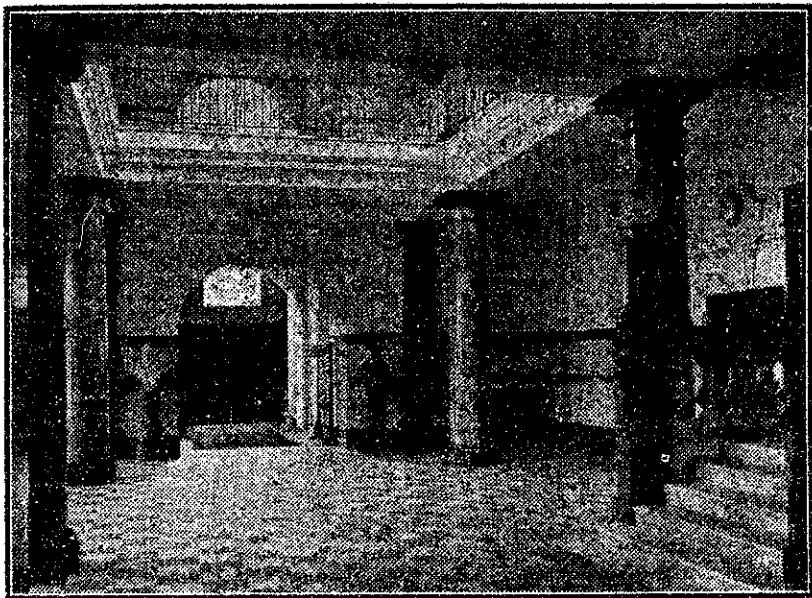


# How Members of Parliament do their Work

In this series of talks Mr. C. E. Wheeler is giving listeners a very entertaining and illuminating glimpse of the life of Members of Parliament. He has shown that there is no room for oratory in Parliamentary life; what cuts more ice is simple, solid sense, soundly said! And there's a great deal more to Parliament than the talking! There's the detailed committee work—the hours of routine—and the constant attention to constituents' needs, to which there is no end. All members have their little list of wants, and woe betide them if their "average" be small!



THE HANDSOME MARBLE LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS.

—Photo., Publicity Department.

In his first "talk," Mr. Wheeler indulged in a gentle jibe at the unresponsive nature of his unseen audience, this being a reflection of the effect upon himself of talking to an inanimate microphone, whose most marked characteristic is a vast capacity for listening—and saying nothing. But Mr. Wheeler has found that the listeners are not unresponsive. So many good, solid folk sought him out to tell him how they had "listened" and enjoyed his talk that he now desires to apologise. He has learnt that the listeners have a "come-back," although, of course, it takes longer to get there!

At any ordinary meeting, a resolution is carried, and usually the unfortunate Secretary is left to attend to the matter. Resolutions can be passed very easily under such circumstances. But in Parliament things have to be more carefully done, because all the machinery of the State is there to carry out the decision. It might involve an obligation on every person in the community—the Statute is passed, and what it directs must be done.

So it is necessary that Parliament should not act in haste, and let New Zealanders repent at leisure. Though any member of the House may introduce a Bill, that privilege carries no guarantee that the Bill will be adopted—on the contrary, unless the Government is responsible for a measure it rarely has a chance of success. Daylight saving has been the subject of a private member's Bill for nineteen sessions, but it has not yet passed.

If the Government decides that legislation is desirable on a particular subject, the Minister who originates the idea has to submit his project to all his colleagues at a meeting of Cabinet, because the Government as a whole is responsible for policy, and any default by one Minister may prejudice them all. Policy having been determined by Cabinet—and in this discussion, in actual practice, the Prime Minister has an absolutely commanding voice—the proposals are drafted into legal shape by skilled lawyers who have made a life-long study of the form of statutes. Now the Bill begins to take shape, and printed drafts, marked in a very large type "Confidential," are circulated to all Ministers so that they may become fully advised of its contents before the measure is finally approved by Cabinet.

## THE LITTLE BILL IS BORN.

Eventually the time arrives for the introduction of the Bill, a formal process. The title only is known at this stage to the members outside Cabinet, but immediately following the introduction, a date having been fixed for second reading, the Government circulates copies, and there is usually a large supply available so that members may send the proposed measure to any of their constituents who may be interested.

The Bill explains its main purpose in a preamble, and then follow the definitions, because it is important that there shall be no two opinions about the meaning of outstanding terms or titles. The operative clauses are carefully numbered, with an additional numbering on the margin, so that any line in the type of the Bill may be picked up at a glance when amendments are to be inserted.

## IT IS READ A SECOND TIME.

The second reading is an important stage. Parliament now has an opportunity of debating the principles involved. Each member may speak for 30 minutes, and if the Bill survives their criticism it goes to the committee of the whole House, when Mr. Speaker leaves control to the Chairman of Committees, and greater latitude of debate is secured by permitting each member to speak on the same point four times, each opportunity extending ten minutes.

Such an arrangement gives almost unlimited chance for discussion, and if there is strong opposition the measure may never get through, because the amendments and the ten-minute speeches multiply. Committee stage is the happy time for the "stone waller." The Government may have a large majority, but it cannot use its power of numbers until the House is ready to vote—and the minority, while quite powerless in the division lobbies, may manage to keep up such a volume of talk that at last the Government recognises the hopelessness of getting on with the business unless the objectionable point is dropped for something less contentious.

## SEDDON'S SIMPLE STONEWALL.

"Stonewalling" is a term which Mr. Speaker will not permit in debate, but the practice he cannot stop, and it constitutes the most formidable weapon of a parliamentary minority. Old hands quickly recognise a stonewall speech—the orator filling in the time saying nothing in particular, though Mr. Speaker is keenly listening to prevent

the introduction of irrelevant matter. But it is hard to trip up such experienced talkers as members of Parliament. They keep up the flood of talk by very amusing but strictly legitimate expedients. The late Mr. Seddon when in Opposition provided himself with an almost unlimited text when he endeavoured to show how one measure, if passed, would prejudice his own constituents. He took up the Westland electoral roll, told the House how the Bill would affect the man whose name appeared on top, and proceeded to deal with every individual alphabetically, and at great length. He got as far as the "Ls" before the joke was called off.

If the talk does thin out on a particular motion, and the stonewallers require more material, they have merely to move another amendment, when the ten-minute speeches (four each) commence again.

## THE ART OF DIVIDING.

Another effective time-wasting method is the moving of a series of amendments, on all of which the House must divide. The Chairman puts the question, declares: "The Ayes have it," the stonewallers shout "The noes have it," and then all through the ramifications of the big Parliamentary building, the division bells ring, warning members, wherever they may be, that within two minutes the doors of the Legislative Chamber will be locked, and if they wish to vote they must be inside. The time limit for this sprint into the Cham-

ber is marked by an old-fashioned sand glass.

## COMING OUT OF COMMITTEE.

A Bill having emerged from Committee, this fact is reported to Mr. Speaker in the House, and the measure is set down for third reading on a subsequent day. This process over, it has to be dispatched with the due formality of a message delivered to the Speaker of the Legislative Council, requesting its concurrence with the measure. All the processes are then repeated in the calm unhurried atmosphere of our colonial House of Lords, which will form the subject of a future talk.

Our Bill passes the Council, and it is then presented, specially printed on parchment, to His Excellency the Governor-General, whose endorsement is given on behalf of His Majesty. In 99 cases out of a hundred this is regarded as purely formal, but if legislation is passed in New Zealand affecting issues of more than domestic concern, such as navigation laws, it is sometimes necessary to secure the consent of His Majesty, which in effect means the reservation of the Bill for the approval of the Imperial Government.

## THE OTHER WORK OF MEMBERS.

I will now go back over the track, because our survey of a Bill has re-

permitted to appear, and the proceedings become longer still.

## PETITIONS AND APPEALS.

Parliament is the final court of appeal for the people, and these select committees are thus of great importance. Statutes are sometimes passed which operate unfairly. The injustice might be admitted by the Courts, but the Judges have to follow the law as it stands. They have no alternative, and even the Court of Appeal can only interpret the law and give a decision accordingly. However, if the decision involves an injustice, the injured person can appeal to Parliament by way of a petition, and if he makes out a good case to a select committee, Parliament will legislate and put the defective Statute right.

Last session select committees dealt with nearly 300 petitions, and made 331 reports to Parliament.

## THEY ALL HAVE THEIR LITTLE LIST.

Now it will be realised that a member's time is not by any means taken up in making speeches in Parliament. He has work of at least equal importance on select committees, and there is still another big task for him. He is a kind of general agent for his constituents. One might wish to be made a J.P. He asks the member to manage it. Another wants a job in the Public Service. The member cannot help him

this talk on Parliament at Work be extended by five minutes."

Very likely, someone who is impatiently waiting for musical items would prefer immediate suspension. In ordinary practice he would move an amendment to this effect, but in committee of Parliament the amendment would have to take the following form:—"That all the words after 'That' be eliminated with the object of inserting other words."

An amendment of this kind, if carried, leaves the field completely open. Any other words may be inserted. It is on record that a member who persistently forced a Bill before the House to deal with the complicated subject of matrimonial relations, got into Committee with his little Bill, which had only one operative clause, and he incautiously agreed to amend it, believing that someone intended to then move the insertion of a modified form of words meaning the same as the original intention, but expressing it more clearly. Alas, the objectors took charge at this stage, and the operative clause having been reduced to the single word "That," they successfully objected to the inclusion of any other words, so the Bill went back from committee with its full title, one clause containing one word "That," and the imprint of the Government Printer.

## APOLOGY TO LISTENERS.

In the opening talk, when discussing the unresponsive nature of the parliamentary audience, and its deadening effect on the speaker, I suggested that my wireless audience was similarly dead and difficult to address.

I am going to recall everything critical about the listener-in. The number of those who took the trouble to find me out and say pleasant things about the little lecturette was surprising. It encourages me to do my best to interpret to a wide—and now I can say, an appreciative, audience—the real spirit of our most important national institution.

## U.S.A. REGULATIONS

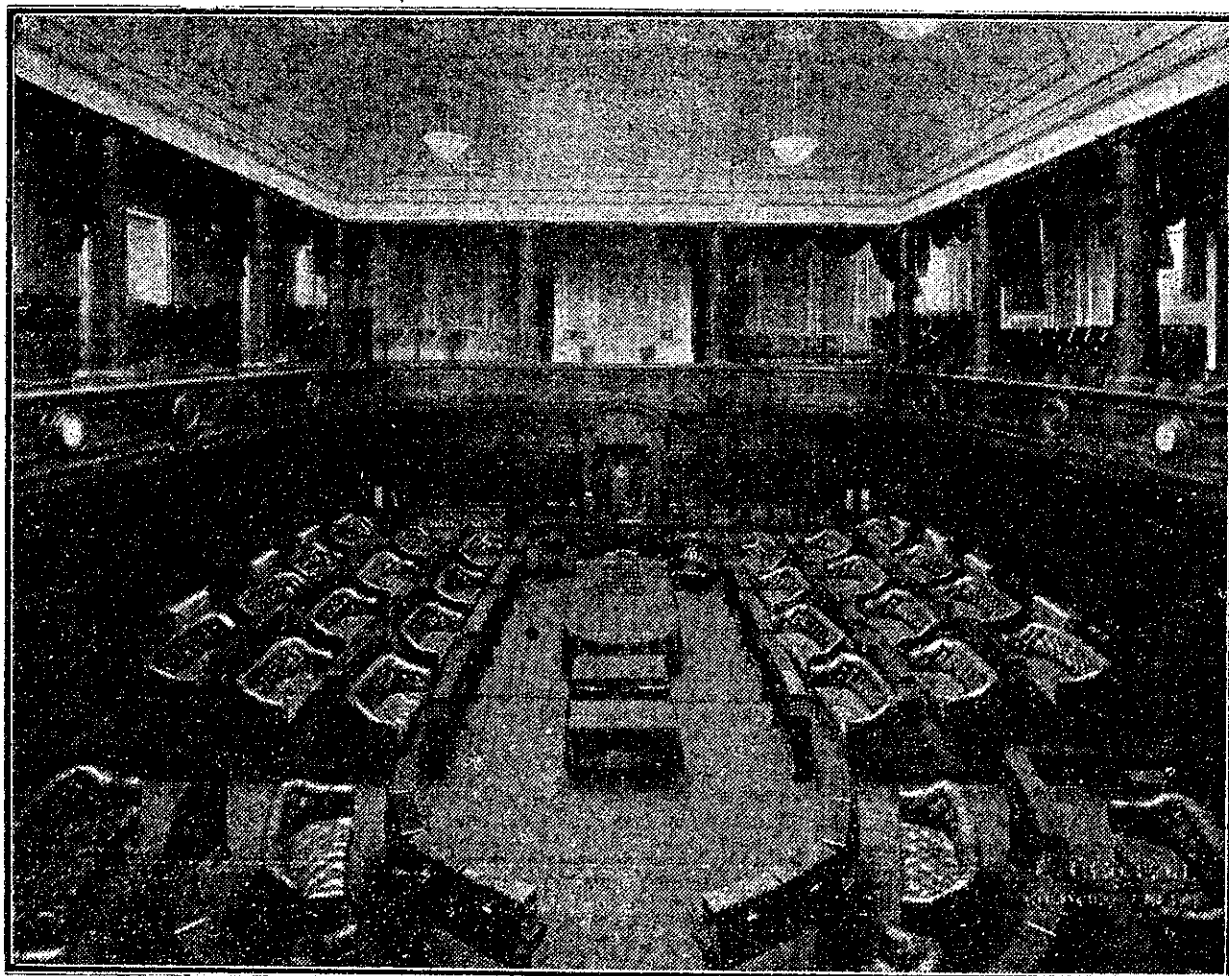
### REDUCED POWER ORDERED

The reallocation of the broadcast stations of the United States, just completed by the Radio Commission (says the New York "Radio News"), leaves few of them on their old frequencies, and the official announcement is that the arrangement is only tentative. There are too many stations in the waveband, in the present state of the radio art. The power of most of the larger stations has been notably reduced; the average for the whole seven hundred stations is now about 645 watts; but twenty-seven stations have half the power and the three largest have about as much as the three hundred smallest, combined. The majority range between 50 and 100 watts.

### Stations Share Hours.

There are now but two high-power stations on each of four frequencies; but as high as seventeen on one of the longer wave-lengths, 223.7 metres, NAA, the Government station, is alone on a wave otherwise reserved for Canadian use. To make even this arrangement tolerable, over two hundred stations have been required to share hours with others nearby; in New York five are "sleeping in one bed." The trouble is, of course, as one distinguished radio authority puts it, that a station's interference range is enormously larger than its service area. While there has been general acceptance of the commission's decisions, because of the realisation that its measures are intended for the general good, there has been much protesting by smaller stations assigned to the lower wavelengths in the crowded New York area; and WMSG has commenced legal proceedings, with a view to testing the constitutionality of the radio act.

San Salvador, Central America, has a broadcast station, AQM, operating on 482 metres. To encourage listening, the Government has reduced the tax on receivers, and made more favourable regulations.



The Chamber of the House of Representatives where our legislation is made. The Speaker's chair is seen in the centre under the Press gallery which is directly overhead. The public and other galleries are on either side. Only very distinguished guests are allowed on to the floor of the House.

—Photo., Publicity Department.

ber is marked by an old-fashioned sand glass.

Marking up the division lists occupies at least another three minutes, so that a division takes up an appreciable amount of time. A famous stonewall organised by the late Mr. Massey in December, 1909, was based on the time-wasting opportunities of divisions. He moved the reduction of a £400 vote sovereign by sovereign—each £1 reduction meaning a division. It would have taken at least a fortnight to work off all the possible divisions—to say nothing of the talk in between—so after four days of continuous sittings, with only short intervals for meals, an exhausted Government Party gave in, and compromised.

A Standing Order which directs that no new business can be introduced into Parliament after 12.30 a.m. is sometimes utilised by stonewallers to prevent progress on a measure which would otherwise be reached before the end of the sitting. If it is second on the list, they discuss with great care the Bill No. 1 on the Order Paper, lose all interest in the matter on the stroke of 12.30 a.m., and smilingly agree to an

lated solely to proceedings before Parliament assembled. Few Bills reach the committee stage in the Legislature without having first been carefully considered by a select committee of members. There are twenty-five select committees of the House of Representatives, each dealing with important subjects as the titles of some of them indicate. The committees include Lands, Industries and Commerce, Petitions, Agricultural and Pastoral, Finance, Labour, and Local Bills. The really important constructive work in amending Bills is done by these select committees. They meet in the mornings (Parliament sits at 2.30 in the afternoon), and they expect to hear from the Minister in charge of the Bill an explanation of every clause. Departmental heads give evidence, and witnesses may be summoned from sections of the community interested. Any person who may be prejudiced by a proposed measure has the opportunity of explaining his grievance to the appropriate Select Committee, and when the subject of a Bill concerns Labour conditions or land tenure, the hearings are usually lengthy. Counsel are sometimes

He must refer him to the Public Service Commissioner. Nearly everybody seems to need a State Advances loan, and the local member has to do his best to facilitate the matter. An Auckland district member recently produced an address book with hundreds of names in it.

"Your political supporters," I suggested.

"Well, I hope so," he replied, "but every name represents an applicant for a State loan, and there are eight hundred on my list. I spend one third of my time dealing with this business."

The representative of an adjoining electorate has 320 applicants on his list of loans.

## A BILL ABOUT "THAT."

The form of amendment in Parliamentary practice is so different from that adopted at ordinary meetings that it is worth describing. Assume that my unseen audience was sufficiently well grouped to express its opinion on what they are hearing to-night. Some enthusiast might kindly move: "That