

*Justice and Legal Affairs Committee*

to be a member of committees which met while the house was not in session. The most recent example of that was a year or so ago, when the Canada Pension Plan committee met under those circumstances. I can say to the hon. member for High Park, who was the chairman of that committee—and he will confirm what I say—that we had no quorum difficulties with that committee. I am sure he will agree with me, as other hon. members would, that that was an excellent committee, and that it was able to do an excellent job.

My fear, from the way we are carrying on, is that our committees will work with reduced quorums. Letting our committees sit only when the house is sitting; making no arrangements for a time when they may occupy the centre of the stage; giving no guarantees that their reports are going to be considered on the floor of the House of Commons, all indicates one thing. It indicates that this experiment we thought we were making for a revised and improved committee structure has not worked out at all.

I believe this whole question of what we do with our committees is extremely important. I am not trying to say that the motion before us today is the most important motion that has ever been brought on the floor of the house. However, the way we handle our committees is extremely important. It is not good enough to say that committees cannot meet because they cannot get a quorum. As a matter of fact the committee in question, which I believe consists of 24 members, has on it 13 members representing the government side of the house. The government itself has sufficient members to provide a quorum. This is true of most of the committees.

This problem is not to be solved simply by saying that the committees can meet with fewer people present and still get their business done. This does not measure up to the great ideal of improving parliament by having a better committee structure, as was proposed last year. I hope we may hear, even if briefly, from the Prime Minister who brought in the rule changes last year, or from the leader of the house who piloted them through the Commons. This was part of the proposal; that committees should have fewer members, quorums consisting of a majority, and better opportunities to do good work.

There are a number of other suggestions which I might make in this regard, but I shall wait for another occasion to do so. I feel it would be a mistake for the house to pass this motion thinking it had thereby put these

committees on a path which might lead somewhere. I urge the house to turn this motion down and to seek other ways of improving the work the committees are doing.

**Mr. Grant Deachman (Vancouver Quadra):** As the person responsible for the co-ordination of house committees during this parliament—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Grant Deachman (Vancouver Quadra):** may be of interest to the house as it considers this motion. In the course of the current parliament 22 committees of the house have been formed. These committees have held 96 committee periods this year, periods lasting approximately one hour and a half. So to date about 144 hours of committee work have been carried out by members of the House of Commons.

Most of these committees are standing committees to which the estimates were referred on March 22 by the house leader. So, as will be seen, the bulk of the work has been accomplished since March 22. We must bear in mind that the Easter holiday intervened for a couple of weeks, with the result that the greater part of the 96 meetings which have been held and the 144 hours of committee work have been in a period lasting approximately three weeks.

I do not want any hon. member who has been serving diligently on committees to think for a moment that his efforts have failed. Indeed, I believe all members ought to congratulate themselves on the effective work they have been doing in attending these committees and operating the committee system.

With regard to the difficulty encountered in getting a quorum on some occasions, I note that on six occasions out of 96 a quorum was not obtained and committees fell on this question. On two of these occasions a very important debate was going on at the time in this chamber. Thus, in the period outside the hours when this house was sitting only four committees out of approximately 90 fell because a quorum could not be obtained. In the circumstances I believe hon. members can commend themselves for having sustained these committees in such a fashion.

There are in the House of Commons some 234 members who are eligible to attend committees. These 234 members certainly cannot be expected, with quorums fixed at 13, to