

a particular section of Ontario or Quebec, they would be referred to this Committee. The result of having a small Committee of this kind, especially adapted for dealing with the work and acting according to a general principle—because the chairman being chosen from the General Committee, there is intercommunion between the Committees on the general question of policy and one line is adopted—is to produce very much better fruits than can be obtained by our system. There is another change which I think would be a very great improvement. You know, Mr. Speaker, that in this House it is a reason for an hon. member to be placed on the Railway Committee because his constituency is interested in the Railway Bill. In England that is a disqualification for being on the Committee. The members who are chosen to be on the Committee to deal with any particular Bill, or group of Bills, has to sign a declaration that he has not a personal and his constituency has not a local interest in that particular Bill, such an interest being regarded, and I think very properly so, as a disqualification for the occupation of the judicial position, which is the position which the committee-man occupies. There is another declaration which is also required to be signed by members, and I think it would pretty much astonish a good many old members here. It is that no member of the Committee shall vote on a Bill unless he has heard or attended to all the evidence. I have noticed an uncommon swelling of the number of the Committee shortly before a vote was taken on an important question, and I am afraid a very large portion could not sign such a declaration in respect to the Bill on which they voted. Moreover, a member who assumes the responsibility of sitting on a Committee in England—and he is bound to accept it unless he can give a valid excuse, such as illness—is bound to attend all its sittings. Without suggesting that we should adopt in all particulars the English method, which I think in some respects is perhaps complicated, we must agree that a system by which the Committees would be very much reduced in numbers would be a system which would be one of great importance; and if hon. gentlemen would adopt the example of the hon. Minister of Public Works, who I observe has declined to sit on any other Committee than that of which he hopes to be Chairman, and give a thorough and exhaustive attention both before the Committee meets and during its sittings to the business of the Committee, we would be able to do much more thorough work. I may mention in this connection a matter which has often struck me as one in which we might effect a great improvement, and that is with regard to the promotion of Private Bills before Committees. We have adopted a system wholly vicious, a system by which members of the House are expected, not merely to introduce and take the first steps in connection with the passage of Private Bills, but also to become their advocates and active promoters, and the position which we see is assumed with regard to such Bills is one which is quite inconsistent with the true position of Members of Parliament called upon to pass judgment on them. The active promotion of Bills should be accomplished by someone not a member of the House, or at all events not a member of the Committee, who will sit in judgment on the Bill. I make these general observations at the commencement of a new Parliament with the object of asking if the Government will not take into consideration the desirability of striking a small Committee to consider the whole subject and see if we cannot mend our ways.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. I quite agree with the hon. gentleman that we should consider the reduction in the Committee on Public Accounts as being an experiment. It is a working Committee and its numbers are too large. We have not had the same members in attendance *de die in diem*; and you know, Mr. Speaker, as the late Chairman of

the Committee, that there was no certainty that members present one day would be present at the next sitting, or that members would keep up a continuous attention to the business before the Committee. So we quite understand that this is an experiment, and it will be quite open to the hon. gentleman to move for an increase in the number or some other change if the experiment should fail. The hon. gentleman says the system in England is just the opposite to the system existing here. Of the six hundred members of the British House of Commons very few sit on Committees at all. There is a selection made of experienced members acquainted with the specific subjects for which the Committees are struck; they are small in number and they work in the same way as sub-committees do to our large Committees on special subjects. I am not sure, however, that we ought hastily to adopt the English system, because they are now harking back to the old practice of Parliament, by the resolutions of the House of Commons last year. They are trying to introduce, indeed they have introduced, the system of Grand Committees which formerly constituted a most important branch of the House of Commons and did a great deal of the work. We, in a rather irregular mode, have had Grand Committees. Our Railway Committee is a Grand Committee, composed as it is of a large number of members of the House, and we have found it to be an advantage as regards that particular Committee to have that large number of members. Railway legislation has been fully discussed there with much more ease than could possibly have been the case with the Speaker in the Chair, and the consequence of having that large Committee, and having the different measures discussed there, has been that the House has been in a great degree relieved from the tedium and waste of time which would be involved in a re-discussion of the measure. And the Committee being a large one, there is not the same objection which would exist in England to hon. members sitting on the Committee, and discussing Railway Bills in which they, or their constituencies, are interested. The Committee being a large one it is right and convenient, I think, that all the railway interests should be represented, and have either, through a member, an agent, or counsel, an opportunity of being heard. In small Committees such as obtain in England, of course it would be exceedingly improper that six or seven of the seven, eight or nine members composing a Committee appointed to report to the House, should be interested in the individual railways. The report of such a committee under such circumstances could have no weight, and should have none. On the other hand, as all our railway interests are represented on our large Railway Committee, and as many of the interests are in rivalry, and thus operate as a check on each other, it is rather convenient as regards the Railway Committee that those interests should be represented. I am obliged to the hon. gentleman for the suggestion that a small Committee should be struck during the Session for the purpose of considering the question. We derive great advantage from the Committee which sat here some years ago and reconsidered the Standing Orders of the House. I will discuss the matter with my friends here, and I will give the hon. gentleman an answer as to whether we think it advisable to strike such a Committee now, or whether we should wait till next Session, when we will have the advantage of seeing how the new system in England will have worked.

Mr. BLAKE. The hon. gentleman has misconceived one point of my remarks. I did not say that the English system in its entirety would be desirable. I want the hon. gentleman to consider as a possible intermediate plan, that the members should be placed on only one important committee, that would considerably relieve the large committees and enable members to give closer attention to the subjects coming before them, instead of being obliged to run from