

*Select Standing Committees*

I have not the figures as to the meetings or average attendance of the committee on Railway Transportation Costs, as the minutes seem to have been mislaid. The committee on Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment met in 1922, percentage attendance 68, but in 1924 the same committee only had a percentage attendance of 46.

It strikes me that in determining the size of committees one should keep in view the nature and extent of the business that is likely to come before any committee.

Mr. HOEY: Could the hon. gentleman give us any figures showing the attendance preceding the session of 1922?

Mr. GOOD: I regret to say that I have not any figures dealing with the committee attendance in previous parliaments.

Mr. HUGHES: I presume the hon. gentleman recognizes the fact that many members of the House are on two, three and four committees, that these committees meet frequently on the same day and at the same hour, and that therefore it is impossible for a member to attend more than one committee meeting on the same day and at the same hour. That fact should be recognized, and it should not be made to appear that members of this House were neglecting their duties.

Mr. GOOD: The hon. member for Kings, P.E.I. (Mr. Hughes) has anticipated what I was going to say in this connection. I do not wish to infer at all that this lack of good attendance is due to negligence or carelessness on the part of hon. members. It may, in some isolated cases be so, but for the most part it is due to the overlapping of committees meeting at the same time and the inability of members to be in two places at once. That is, however, a condition which we have to face. My proposal is that this matter should be faced frankly and courageously, and that we should make some effort to remedy the difficulties that we have met in the past. The Chief Clerk of Committees, Mr. Todd, was good enough to write me a letter in connection with the tabular statement, and I should like to quote, with his permission which he has given me, three paragraphs from his letter. Mr. Todd, I understand, has had very extensive experience and he speaks with some authority in regard to this question. I quote as follows:

From my own experience, I may state that during the last three or four sessions, when committee work has been quite heavy, a number of members have complained that they have been put upon too many committees, and could not attend to them all. As a consequence, we have frequently experienced considerable difficulty in procuring a quorum.

—Mr. Good.]

It seems to me that if the membership of the standing committees were cut in half, and members of the House were placed on, say only two committees each, there would be less trouble in obtaining the necessary quorums.

And the final paragraph:

The Railway committee, for instance, consists of 128 members, with a quorum of 25, or five more of a quorum than that required for the House itself. In former years, when railway legislation was very important and numerous bills were referred to that committee, most of the members wanted to be on it. Now, however, that the number and character of railway bills is not as it used to be, members have not the same interest, with resultant difficulty in our obtaining a quorum. I think the size of this committee especially, and of its quorum, should be very considerably reduced to meet present conditions.

I also have some information regarding the reduction of the size of committees in Great Britain almost a century ago owing to their experience. I shall not weary the House with reading this; I desire merely to refer to it.

In order to get some further information on the subject matter of the resolution, I drafted the following questionnaire which I mailed to the clerks of the legislative assemblies of all the provinces of Canada, also to the Clerk of the House of Representatives at Washington. I have received some information from most of these parties. Following is a list of questions submitted in this connection:

1. Total membership of your legislature.
2. Names of your various standing and special committees, and number of members composing each of them.
3. The provisions for a quorum in each case.
4. Have you had poor or irregular attendance at committee meetings, and if so, for what reasons?
5. What principles, if any, determine the size of your committee?
6. Is there discernible any disposition to increase or decrease the size of your committees, and if so, upon what experience is this disposition based?
7. Do you find a higher percentage of attendance and better results from smaller committees?

I will give as briefly as I can the substance of the information that I have been able to secure from the various provinces in this connection.

In Ontario, the committees are large and the quorum small. I do not wish to give all the figures. My information is that the attendance is fairly good and that there is not much disposition to make any change. I believe, however, that I am safe in saying that most of the standing committees about which I have information meet more or less infrequently for special purposes and not for investigational work such as is frequently carried on in this House. The difficulty, therefore, which has been referred to, namely the inability of members to attend two committees at the same time, does not seem to have applied, at least to the same extent.