

*Procedure Committee Report*

The pension plan is a good one to consider. Here is a plan which has been presented and withdrawn six times, somebody said—it does not matter whether it is four times or seven; it has been changed and modified to a large extent. While people generally are in favour of a portable pension plan they are not in favour of many of the clauses in the bill put forward by the government. Many of them are not impressed by the actuarial soundness of the plan and this was demonstrated not long ago in the public statements of a high ranking civil servant who felt the need to rise and speak from his experience of this particular plan. It is obvious that this same concern felt across the nation cannot be reflected in this house. If we streamline the rules of parliament to such an extent that measures must pass and business must be proceeded with, making it difficult for pressure in the country to be felt here, we would not be too far from a dictatorship. A great deal of our cherished democracy would be lost if we were to strait-jacket the House of Commons by rules. We must always bear in mind that this is a place for debate, for inquiry and for clarification. Often this process will take a good deal of time, depending on the complications and the divisions within the country.

In concluding my remarks I should like to say one more word about the proposal that committees should sit while the house is not in session. I see no real harm in this if a committee has to travel abroad or outside the city of Ottawa. But as long as the committee is sitting in Ottawa it is my belief that it would be to the detriment of members of parliament to have it sitting while the house is not in session. To allow small isolated groups work on committees while others were not, would lead, in my opinion, to a comparatively small number of members being well informed on a particular subject, while the vast majority who did not serve on that committee would be sadly lacking in knowledge.

I have always believed that as a member of parliament I should at all times keep abreast of the legislation before the house. The difficulties I have just foreseen were borne out to some extent by the experience of the committee which recently sat while the house was adjourned for the Christmas recess. We have already run into a problem which we would not have had if that committee had

been sitting while the house was sitting. We had to postpone consideration of legislation. The reason for this procedure can be found in the fact that this committee sat while the house was not sitting. The fact that the translation was not being made could have been ascertained a month or two ago. It could have been seen that the evidence was printed in both languages. This is a minor matter, but it never would have happened if the committee had not been sitting while the house was adjourned.

I see no harm in a committee that must travel around in order to inquire into its given subject, either in Canada or abroad, doing so while the house is adjourned. I think it is to the benefit of all members if it is at all possible, for committees to sit while the house is sitting. One could say that the proposed rule change under which the house would sit three weeks and the committees one week would give everybody a chance to go home for a week. But what would happen then? We are now nearly four months behind schedule in the light of considering the number of sessions per year. What would happen with this type of procedure? I feel that we would drop farther and farther behind as the years went on. As a matter of fact, I like to go home as well as the next man. However, I cannot readily agree that this substantial change in the time of committee sittings should be made.

In summarizing my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I say briefly that I disagree with the structural changes in the committees. I think the size of the committees would mean that I and many members of parliament could not represent their constituents properly. I doubt that the time arrangement under the proposed rule change would be of any real benefit and it may be a detriment. There are some who might like to see our committees have the powers that committees have in the United States. I believe that under our system of responsible government this is nearly an impossibility. Our committees could function very effectively if the government took its work seriously, if the government referred a given subject to a committee and expected a thorough inquiry into that subject, rather than a broadcast of information to the people such as has happened in the defence committee. I do not believe this is the purpose of committees of this house—to spread propaganda and smooth out difficult political situations in this country. I believe committees could be really effective if the

[Mr. Horner (Acadia).]