

Fournier (Madawaska-Restigouche), Hastings, Inman, Lefrançois, McGrand, Pearson, Quart, Roebuck and Sparrow.

Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. A. Hamilton McDonald: Honourable senators, I should point out to the house that this morning a meeting was called of the chairmen of special and standing committees in an attempt to discuss some of the problems we ran into regarding committee meetings during the previous session.

The sitting of committees while the Senate is in session was one question which was discussed. I would like to refer to that paragraph of honourable Senator Croll's motion which deals with the committee on poverty sitting "during sittings and adjournments of the Senate". In my opinion, two interpretations can be placed on the wording "to sit during sittings and adjournments of the Senate."

Some people argue that to sit "during sittings" means that the committee may sit on a day when the Senate sits but does not mean that it may sit while this chamber is in session. Others argue that the meaning of the phrase "to sit during sittings" means that a committee may sit while the chamber is actually in session. This has led in the past to some argument and some confusion.

However, this morning at the meeting held with the chairmen of standing and special committees, a proposal was made which states as follows—and I will read from the notes which were taken during that meeting:

That Senate committees, standing and special, be not given a blanket power in their terms of reference to sit while the Senate is sitting, with the understanding that exemptions can be negotiated to accommodate exceptional circumstances when they arise.

In the discussion which took place prior to the agreement on the statement I have just read, we all appreciated that there are extenuating circumstances, especially when special committees are sitting.

Some of these difficulties have been brought about by the fact that when witnesses are asked to appear before a special committee—most of them are not subpoenaed but are requested—sometimes it is most difficult to have them appear at a set hour on a

set day of the week. Consequently, the committee members must arrange their work so that they are available when a witness finds it possible to appear before them, either in Ottawa or in other parts of Canada.

Of course, as regards the motion we are dealing with now on the Committee on Poverty, there will be many extenuating circumstances. I believe that the leaders of the two groups in the house can co-operate with the chairmen of both special and standing committees to meet the needs of the chairmen and of the committees generally, and I object to giving blanket power to any committee to sit while this chamber is in session.

I believe that in extenuating circumstances when it is necessary to grant them the right to sit for a day or two days or perhaps two weeks when the house is in session, this can be worked out.

The problem in the past has been that if blanket power is given to the chairman of any committee to sit while the house is in session, a chairman of another committee will seek to do the same thing. We had the experience on many occasions in the previous session of this chamber being very sparsely attended—not because senators were absent without reason, but because they were working on committees which were sitting while this chamber was in session.

I believe we can accommodate the chairmen and our committees by negotiating the times when they can sit while the house is in session. I believe that we should follow the recommendation of our chairmen of committees made this morning, that we should not give blanket powers to committees to sit while the house is in session.

Hon. Allister Grosart: On that point, I call to your attention that we have new rules in the Senate, and that Rule 76(4) reads:

A select committee shall not sit during a sitting of the Senate.

We also have another rule which requires any motion to set aside our rules, with leave, to state "the rule or part thereof proposed to be suspended". The rule requires that that be "distinctly stated".

It seems to me that in many ways we have developed a certain casualness about our rules. I suggest that if we keep our rules we will not get into the situation where it is taken for granted that we are going to do certain things—as in the situation a short