

Mr. Knowles: On division, Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to on division.

CONCURRENCE IN SECOND REPORT OF
STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington South) moved:

That the second report of the standing committee on public accounts, presented to the house on Wednesday, April 27, 1966, be now concurred in.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): This is a slightly different motion, and the arguments that can be advanced are different from those advanced for the reduction of the quorum. I had hoped the government house leader would ask that this motion be allowed to stand until some discussion could take place amongst the parties as to the extension of sittings. The problem we have in committees cannot really be solved so long as estimates are referred to these committees.

When the members agreed to the change in the rule they were of the opinion that there was going to be a discussion of estimates in these committees, and that this discussion would eliminate some of the debates which took place in the house. In return for this many members agreed to a limitation of the debate on estimates in the house. Now we are hearing a plea for a reduction in the quorums of these committees, but they will not work any better if you reduce the quorum from 15 to 10 or to 5. Eventually we will get to the position where a committee can hold a meeting if only the chairman is present. This will not solve the problem and will not satisfy the country.

There has been a suggestion from the member who is co-ordinating these committees that members who are not on these committees be established as second class members of the committee. If every other member of the committee has completed his discussion, these second class members will be allowed to ask their questions.

In my opinion all this is contrary to what we are trying to do. I feel it is a fact that we are trying to operate more committees than we can legitimately operate. We have increased the space available for these committees; we have provided the facilities to allow them to operate. However, we just do not have enough people. It seems to me that if the Prime Minister is really interested in substituting committee consideration of estimates for consideration in the house, then those members who are interested in matters before the committees should be allowed to

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participate in the discussion even though they are not members of the committee.

Then, too, the committees have got to be operated in such a way that a member will not find he has to be in three places at the same time, and therefore is not in a position to do the job he is supposed to do. One morning I was supposed to be at three committee meetings. I thought about this for several minutes and finally came to the conclusion it was not worth while making up my mind which one I should attend, so I did not go to any of them. I think this must be true of other members.

There is something else that has to be taken into consideration. There is this bilingual aspect of parliament in which most people are interested, but no consideration has been given to that. There are 35 members of the house who meet to study French for two hour periods when committees are meeting. There are seven or eight members who are studying English at this time. This further decreases the number of members free to attend committee meetings. If we are not really willing to face these facts then we can reduce the quorums, we can sit when the house is sitting, but we will not have solved the basic problem. If we are going to use the majority in this house to insist that things run smoothly on the surface, then we will create a situation that will blow sky high before very long.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I think the house leader is well aware of the problem with which he is now faced and of our inability to solve it. On many occasions in this house recently the attendance has dropped to as low as 15 to 17 members, but no one has brought it to the attention of Your Honour for the simple reason that we are trying to get things done. I suggest that the situation will only deteriorate further if the quorum of this committee is reduced, quite apart from the quorums of other committees handling very important business which will wish to sit while the house is sitting.

I have not objected to this being done on a temporary basis. When some very important matter is put before a committee it has the right to make this request and have it granted on such an occasion. But to give blanket approval to such a situation would mean that not only would ten members of the public accounts committee be withdrawn from the house any time the committee wanted to meet, but possibly members of all the committees could be withdrawn if the occasion