

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 4, 1966

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

[Translation]

VACANCY

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the house that I have received a communication advising me that a vacancy occurred in the representation, namely that of Mr. Clément Vincent, member for the electoral district of Nicolet-Yamaska, by way of resignation.

I have accordingly issued my warrant to the chief electoral officer to make out a writ of election for the said electoral district.

[English]

JUSTICE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

CONCURRENCE IN FIRST REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. A. J. P. Cameron (High Park) moved that the first report of the standing committee on justice and legal affairs, presented to the house on April 26, be now concurred in.

• (2:40 p.m.)

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words against the adoption of this motion. I am not suggesting that the time of the house should be taken up for long. I am not suggesting that the time of the house should be taken for a division; but it seems to me that we should look very carefully at what we will be doing if this motion is passed.

The proposal is that the committee of which the hon. member for High Park is chairman have its quorum reduced from 13 to 10 members. I do not blame the hon. member for making this request, but I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this is a very superficial way in which to deal with the problem that seems to be facing us in the committee work of this House of Commons. No suggestion for the improvement of parliament has been more universally made than the suggestion that we should do more work in committees, and that we should improve our committee work.

The government at the last session of parliament gave some attention to this problem and brought in suggestions and proposals

which, in effect, involved a complete reconstruction of our committee setup. Hon. members know that the names of committees were changed and that a number of other alterations were made. One of the alterations made was to increase relatively the size of the quorum. Under the old rules, under the provisions of standing order 65, the committees had various quorums. They ran at about 30 per cent of the total membership.

In the last session the government deliberately, after much forethought, asked this house to approve that from now on the committees would be smaller in size but would have a quorum of not less than 50 per cent of the membership. There is the provision in the standing orders for the quorum to be reduced under certain circumstances, but that was to be by way of exception.

I suggest that the government asked this house to take a deliberate decision that our committees should operate with a quorum of not less than a majority of the members. The government, in taking this step, in effect stated its view that we should do more work in our committees, and that the committees should do better work. This is a point of view that we all share, and I want to say that I share it too. I think parliament could be greatly improved if we were to upgrade the work done in our committees.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the great reform that was brought in at the last session has not turned out to be such a tremendous reform after all. Committees are having difficulty in getting sufficient members to carry on. Generally speaking they are not making parliament work in the way we thought they would.

I think there are other things that ought to be done. I think the work of our committees should be upgraded by having some arrangement whereby they are encouraged to bring in reports, with the assurance that those reports will be considered in this house. I think we should make arrangements, as has been proposed, for committees to sit at times when the house does not sit so those committees can devote their full attention to their work.

It has been my experience on two or three occasions during the years I have been here