

*Government Organization*

house procedure, I suppose I am really putting my head in the lion's mouth in disagreeing with them. However, I think they themselves put part of the argument when they suggested it is really the responsibility of the house to establish particular committees to deal with this question or that.

Under normal circumstances their suggestion is correct. But the very fact that the house from time to time must make that kind of decision means there may well be many occasions when the importance of questions raised with regard to the operations of this department should be considered by a special committee. It may be, and I apologize to the house for insufficient draftsmanship at this point, that I should have added another sentence at the end, namely, that in all other respects it would function as a regular standing committee of the House of Commons. If that would satisfy hon. members to my left and those on the other side of the house, I would be happy to add those words. I gather, however, the nature of the objection is more than that.

While the house leader was anxious to jump into the discussion and give the house his views on the matter I am sorry that he did not express, nor did the minister, their views on the importance of a member of the opposition functioning as Chairman of the committee. I do not know whether he thought this was not an important question to be resolved in the context of this amendment, but it is one of the questions that should be looked at very seriously. If there is to be the degree of impartiality and the breadth of discussion necessary in order that all facts are known on a regular basis, some such arrangement should obviously be very seriously considered. That, of course, is all that is included—

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** Mr. Chairman, could I ask the hon. member a question? What exactly is the reason he would give why a member of the opposition would be less partial in this political body than a member supporting the government?

**Mr. Baldwin:** Experience!

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** Mr. Chairman, I would think the answer to that question is obvious. But if the minister needs an answer, it is of course the fact that the government has on this committee and on any other, of course, a majority of members. I am trying to balance off what are the particular partisan positions of members. No one is denying,

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

least of all me, that every member who functions on a committee represents to some degree his own party and his own position in the house. But I think we must try and create—this is the closest I can come to it—a committee that allows for enough balance so that it can make the full and frank inquiry that is necessary. Otherwise, I presume there will be some movement on the government side to do away with having a member of the opposition chair the Public Accounts Committee.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** Mr. Chairman, I was referring to a previous chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** We have the situation wherein a majority of government members give the government security in committees with respect to votes, provided there is not too great a number of government absentees. But even if the government majority is not so overwhelming, as often occurs in the present set-up of standing committees, the government majority shows up in the reports of committees to the house. Under this practice, a committee is nothing more than a sounding board of what the government is about. I think that if House of Commons committees, and this one in particular, are to be more credible to the house and the country, some measure of impartiality through balance has to be achieved. That is the reason for the suggestion that a member of the opposition act as chairman.

• (10:20 p.m.)

I might conclude my remarks by putting this question to the minister. Since he suggested that such a provision does not need to be included in the statute, I wonder whether he would give an undertaking to the house that a measure similar to this one would be introduced by the government benches so that we could have an inquiry into this department on a regular basis.

**Mr. Marchand (Langelier):** I do not think it would be proper for me at the present time to make a commitment of this kind in the name of the government.

**The Deputy Chairman:** Shall the amendment carry?

**Some hon. Members:** No.

**The Deputy Chairman:** The amendment is negatived, on division.

Amendment (Mr. MacDonald, Egmont) negatived.