

Mines, Forests and Waters Committee

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Look at your own benches.

Mr. Murphy: I submit that we are not asking for anything unfair. We will not sit unless it is absolutely necessary to do so; and, as I say, we will simply have to come back to this house again for concurrence in case we have to ask for permission to sit while the house is sitting.

Mr. McIlraith: Since I am not a member of the committee in question, Mr. Speaker, I propose to limit my remarks somewhat more than I otherwise might.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. McIlraith: I am not wholly displeased when I find that my remarks in this respect are not wholly agreeable to certain of the backbenchers on the government side, because if they were applauding me I would begin to think I was wrong. When they are opposing me I feel that I am right. The issue here is quite narrow and quite specific, and I think it should be laid before the house for its attention.

The part of the committee report to which I take exception is the part asking that the committee have leave to sit while the house is in session. The hon. member proposing the motion stated three times in his remarks—as a matter of fact, twice in the form of an undertaking—that he would not ask that the committee sit while the house was in session. I know of no stronger case that could be made as to why the committee should not have this extraordinary power.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): That was not the whole statement.

Mr. Murphy: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member will refer to my notes a little more closely I think he will see I said that I was not asking that the committee sit while the house was in session unless it was absolutely necessary.

Mr. McIlraith: That is correct; that is my understanding of what the hon. member said, and I heard him aright. I think this is the clearest possible reason why the house ought not to give this power. The power for a committee to sit while the house is in session is an extraordinary power, and unless the proponent of the motion asking for that extraordinary power is in a position to give some reason why that power should be given to the committee, I respectfully submit that it ought not to be given.

Some reference was made to the atomic energy committee. The case there was quite clear—if the hon. member will check his *Hansards* carefully enough I think he will

first report. I have the records for quite a number of years, but I shall refer only to recent years. In 1955 there were 15 committees set up, three of which were given the power to sit while the house was sitting at the time those committees were constituted. There were six committees given this power subsequent to the presentation of the first reports to the house. In 1956 there were 10 committees set up, all of which except four were given the power to sit while the house was sitting, which power was requested after the first meeting of the committees. At the first session in 1957 there were eight committees, and they all received permission to sit while the house was sitting after the filing of their first reports. During the second session of 1957 four committees were set up, two of which were given the power to sit while the house was sitting. This power was granted after the presentation of the first reports. The other two committees were granted this power after subsequent meetings.

I might remind the hon. member that on three occasions he was chairman of the atomic energy committee and the research committee, and all those committees were given the power to sit while the house was sitting at the time those committees were constituted. I might say, Mr. Speaker, that at our first meeting last week everyone agreed that we would be asking for the power to sit while the house was sitting, and there was no objection. We had the reporters present at our meeting this morning, but we are not able to authorize the printing of the report until we get the concurrence of the house in this report. I may say to the hon. member who has raised this question that it was definitely understood by all members of our committee this morning that we would not ask the committee to sit while the house was sitting unless that was absolutely necessary.

It is expected that this committee will have to have eight or ten meetings. If another department were referred to us this would entail probably six additional meetings. If we do not get concurrence in the report today, Mr. Speaker, it might mean that we would have to ask later for the power to sit while the house is sitting. I appreciate, as do all hon. members in this house, that the opposition is limited in numbers, through no fault of ours.

The objection taken in the estimates committee was that the opposition wanted their members to be in the house. Now, if you or anyone else, Mr. Speaker, would like to count the number of Liberal members who are here, I think that you would find there are less than 20.