

committee meetings. I know they would not contribute very much, but at least their bodies would be there and could be counted in order to make up a quorum. If we press on with this measure, I think some responsible member of the government should give us full assurance that a real effort is going to be made to get these parliamentary secretaries moving. I have in mind the existing ones, those who will probably be removed and those who will be promoted.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Chairman, I had hoped I might be enlightened here this afternoon about something that has intrigued me. The Prime Minister, when talking in Kiev, referred to the similarity between the system of government in that country and in Canada.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is what bothers us.

Mr. Stanfield: I rather imagined that as a result of that, this bill might have been held up until the Prime Minister returned to suggest certain amendments in light of his experience.

An hon. Member: Do you want to go to Siberia?

Mr. Stanfield: I must say that the Prime Minister's remarks were a little obscure. I had hoped the Acting Prime Minister, with his great precision and facility for enlightenment on questions of this sort, would have risen in his place this afternoon and explained what this was all about, and whether in fact the Prime Minister has made a great discovery while abroad, and whether this bill, if passed in its present form, will be satisfactory to the right hon. gentleman when he returns.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, I should like to support the contentions voiced by the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster in respect of committees. I should like to draw to the attention of the committee, especially the government House leader, that while we are discussing this important clause dealing with parliamentary secretaries, there is a meeting taking place of more than one standing committee of the House which would naturally require the attendance of parliamentary secretaries since they are supposed to be exemplary members of the House. They, being dedicated members of the House, I imagine want to support the committee.

Today's *Votes and Proceedings* indicates that the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs was to meet today at 3.30 p.m. One of the hon. members to appear before that committee is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. This is regrettable because I am sure he would like to be in the House during the discussion of this important clause of a bill which deals with parliamentary secretaries.

The Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration was to meet today at 3.30 p.m. I am sure the presence of the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour, who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, is required at that meeting. I am sure there are other committees meeting today. Some met this morning, and I am sure they are continuing those meetings this afternoon.

Government Organization Act, 1970

I have raised this point before and I do so again. Obviously, some action must be initiated by the government House leader to assure the proper organization of committees so that they do not sit while the House is sitting. If committees must sit while the House is in session they should only sit for a very good reason. In other words, there should be an urgent or pressing matter, or a very important bill to be discussed. These should be the only reasons for granting permission to committees to sit while the House is in session.

Let me suggest also to the government House leader that it is about time we defined the rules of the House for the benefit of standing committees. Committees are governed by the rules of the House of Commons, and in my view this must preclude standing committees of this House sitting and hearing evidence without a quorum. This practice has crept into our standing committees and it is one which should be stopped. On many occasions witnesses have been heard when only four members of a standing committee were in attendance. This is a ridiculous situation, and under these circumstances the committee is not legally in session. I note that Your Honour is about to rise. I have just about concluded this part of my remarks and I ask your indulgence for any transgression on your patience and charity.

In dealing with this clause of the bill, I should like to ask the President of the Treasury Board whether it is the intention of the government to continue the practice whereby parliamentary secretaries are appointed for only one year. I should like to see a return to the practice under which parliamentary secretaries are appointed at pleasure, the same as members of the cabinet.

Mr. Baldwin: You should say at leisure.

Mr. McGrath: I say that out of the very high regard, respect and sympathy I have for some former parliamentary secretaries who are outstanding members of this House, many of whom are good friends of mine. I think the fact that most of their appointments were not renewed by the government will place them in a very difficult position in their constituencies, as, it has in this House. Off the top of my head, I can think of members of the House such as the hon. member for Essex, who was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, the hon. member for York Centre, who did such an outstanding job as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, and the hon. member for Victoria who did such a fine job as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. We wonder why it was necessary to make these changes. Perhaps it is about time we seriously considered the proposition of reverting to the original system whereby parliamentary secretaries were appointed at pleasure in order to avoid members of the House being embarrassed by not having their appointments renewed by the government. I ask this question of the President of the Treasury Board in the hope that perhaps he can enlighten the committee on it.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, while the President of the Treasury Board is reflecting on that—