

object. We think it should possess this authority and that the motion as it appears on the order paper should be supported by the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments on the particularly significant motion now before us. We have agreed to hold this debate today because committees are becoming ever more important.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the usefulness of committees for the study of bills referred to them by the House. We also admit that it is necessary for committees, particularly for the one that will be entrusted with the study of the constitution, to travel across Canada in order to better understand the problems and find more suitable solutions.

We agree that travelling across the country is necessary to meet the people who have briefs to submit or suggestions to make regarding the programs brought forward by the government.

However, I am wondering what the members of what we call "the other place" have to do with the establishment of the committee with which we are concerned at the present time. I do not see very well how the honourable senators can make a worthwhile contribution to committees established by the House of Commons, since they are not the representatives of the people but were appointed by the governments in office.

Some may disagree with me, but I believe that the House members on the various standing or special House committees are well qualified to gather all the information required from the experts appearing before such committees.

Committees are important due to the fact that, in the course of their proceedings, either in Ottawa or elsewhere, the members are able to question experts on the matters of concern to them. The establishment of the Committee on the Constitution of Canada is justified since in the last few years federal-provincial conferences have been dealing with the problem of the Canadian Constitution.

The last one brought us back to the starting point by suggesting that there should not be a new constitution but that the present one be amended instead, and the Committee is asked to study the report containing those recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to endorse the proposals of my hon. friend, the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), in connection with the simultaneous sittings of the committees and of the House.

In view of the fact that the Committee on the Constitution will have to leave the House about one week every month from now until the end of June, the fact that it will often be away is going to deprive the House of the contributions of a number of members.

It must also be kept in mind that several other committees will have to travel. For instance, another special

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committee, the Committee on Pollution and Environment, will require its members to travel across the country in order to see for themselves the problems caused by pollution.

Moreover, the members of parliamentary associations have to travel during the year. As a matter of fact, the NATO Parliamentary Association for instance is to meet in Europe in November. On that occasion, several members will be away from the House.

In view of the proliferation of all those committees and associations, I am wondering whether the role of the House is not being suppressed progressively and turned over to the committees. What is more important, the House or the committees? That is the question.

As for me, I maintain that the business of the House should come first and that the business of the committees should never interfere with or duplicate the business of the House.

Furthermore, we should consider more seriously the work performed in the committees. In fact, the task of a committee was to study the housing problem in Canada. A report was presented by its members and a minister had to resign because the recommendations of that committee did not receive sufficient implementation.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence. I remember that, on two occasions at least, we were sent to Europe to visit the members of the armed forces, especially in Germany and, to our great surprise, upon our arrival there and before the committee study was completed and a report published, we learned that the government had decided to curtail its military establishments in Europe.

Later on, in September 1969, the committee visited Halifax and the Maritimes to study the problem of the naval forces stationed there. Once again, to our great surprise, while visiting the navy buildings, we learned that the government had decided to scrap the airplane carrier *Bonaventure*. Then we start asking ourselves questions and wondering about the usefulness of the committees if the government does not even take into account the reports which they submit.

I hope that the travelling which the committee on the constitution might wish to do throughout Canada, will be useful and that the government will have at least enough sense not to take a decision before the committee report has been presented to the House.

Mr. Speaker, before concluding my remarks, I should like to echo the very suggestion made earlier by my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) to the effect that it would be advisable for the House not to sit for one week every month, so as to enable every committee to sit and so that the members of Parliament may not have to run from one committee room to the other or from a committee sitting to the House of Commons.

At the present time, the government may perhaps turn this situation to its advantage because of its heavier