

Select Standing Committees

worst of all, the competition between the two systems to get the business.

Mr. WARD: I am very glad to accept the suggestion of the Postmaster General. I think the resolution has served its purpose, and I am sure we all appreciate the information which the minister has given with respect to the services already given and his promise to continue the good work. I am very glad, therefore, with the permission of the seconder to withdraw this motion.

Motion withdrawn.

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEES

MOTION BY MR. GOOD TO REDUCE THE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. W. C. GOOD (Brant) moved:

That in the opinion of this House, the membership on select standing committees should be reduced, so as to secure more regular attendance, and promote efficiency.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I think that at the outset we may assume that the committee work of parliament is very important; I do not suppose anybody will dispute that statement. I think I may also safely say that the committee work of the Canadian parliament is growing in importance. I think this is necessarily the result of the situation which faces us at the present time where we have abandoned the two parties in the country and in the House, and have here several distinct groups. We may have at any time a condition such as prevailed in England not long ago where the administration of affairs was carried on by a minority government. Unless some new methods can be evolved and applied, to operate the government on non-partisan lines, this situation may face us more or less continuously in the near future; and under such conditions I would submit to the House that the committee work of parliament is likely to be increasingly important. I therefore argue that committee work ought to be made as effective as possible. What conditions, then, would best conduce to efficiency on the part of our committees? I presume that regular and full attendance is at least one of the conditions that are necessary before committee work can be carried on effectively. In that regard I should like to submit to the House some statistics which I obtained from the Chief Clerk of Committees in regard to the work of committees in this House during the last three years. I desire to go into this in some detail, because I consider it very illuminating indeed. I have before me a tabulated statement, under the headings of the three years 1922,

[Mr. W. F. Maclean.]

1923 and 1924, and sub-headings as follows namely; The meetings held; the number of members; the average attendance and percentage attendance of all the committees of this House, both standing committees and special committees.

I want to deal with this table in some detail in order if possible to interpret the situation and get some light as to what ought to be done to make our committee work more effective. Let us take first the standing committee on Agriculture and Colonization. In 1922 nineteen meetings were held. The total membership of the committee was 105, the average attendance 64, and the percentage attendance 61, showing a very good attendance of a very large committee during that year. Those who were on the committee probably recall that a number of fairly important matters came before the committee, and a fairly large number of meetings were held. In the next year, 1923, the same committee had ten meetings, the same membership, 105, average attendance 45, and percentage attendance 43, a much poorer attendance in 1923 than in 1922. In 1924 there were only seven meetings held. The membership was the same, 105, average attendance 40 and percentage attendance 38. I presume, Mr. Speaker, that there is at least one conclusion or inference that we may draw at this point. If a committee has really no serious work before it, nothing of a very important character, the meetings are few and the attendance is likely to be bad. That I think is probably the inference we can draw from the figures I have given the House.

Let us pass now to the Banking and Commerce committee. In the year 1922 that committee had ten meetings, total membership 82, average attendance 19 and the percentage attendance 23. Less than one-quarter of the membership attended the meetings of the committee that year.

The next year the Bank Act was under revision, and another very important matter was also submitted to that committee by this House. There were 75 meetings held; with a total membership of 89, the average attendance was 45, and the percentage attendance 51. Considering the importance of the work the committee had to do in the year 1923, the attendance was surely bad. Later on I shall try to show the House why it was as bad as it was, only slightly over fifty per cent. The next year, 1924, the committee held 40 meetings; with a total membership of 90 the average attendance was 47, and the percentage attendance 52, the percentage attendance being practically the same as during the year preceding.