

Business of the House

Mention was made of the number of committees, and certainly we have a large number of committees sitting. I think it could be said for the establishment of these committees, on a more extensive scale than ever before, that they have been effective and thorough and that the members of the various committees are entitled to the commendation of the house as a whole. I know it is difficult when important matters come before the house for committee members to be always present. But I hope, as I said earlier, that when such matters of great importance are before the house the committees, as a whole, would agree to the necessary measures of adjournment to the end that those members of the committees who wish to participate in those discussions would be given the opportunity to do so.

That is all I intend to say. I feel sure that if we apply ourselves with energy, without in any way diminishing or abdicating our responsibility, we shall be able, before this session concludes as a continuous session, to have dealt with all the matters to which reference has been made.

Mr. G. J. McIlraith (Ottawa West): I wonder whether I might ask the Prime Minister a question arising out of his remarks. I should like to refer particularly to his remark about liking parliament and his later remark about the committee work of the house. How does he reconcile his liking of parliament with the fact that he has so arranged the business that three very important committees, namely those on banking and commerce, agriculture and colonization and railways, canals and telegraph lines will be sitting today while the House of Commons itself is debating an amendment to our constitution, a most important matter in which many hon. members are very much interested? Yet they will be expected to attend committee hearings and miss the debate in the house.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Of course the answer is obvious. The committees decide for themselves when they will sit.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hellyer: Did the defence expenditures committee decide for itself?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order; I suggest that further questions be reserved until orders of the day are called, which I shall do now, if there is nothing further under motions. The hon. member for Essex East.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

On the orders of the day:

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Does the Prime Minister not recall saying that as Prime Minister and as leader of the house he would see to it that committee meetings were not held in a manner and at a time that would prevent members from discharging their responsibilities in this house? And if he recalls that, will he not agree that his answer to the hon. member for Ottawa West is not consistent with his earlier declaration?

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): The paraphrase by the hon. member of the answer I gave is one that I do not accept. I have no authority, as I pointed out, to interfere in any way with the committees. I expressed the hope that there would be, in no way, any interference and that committees would realize that when important matters arose in the house there would be justification for not sitting on such occasions. However, the determination of that matter is for the committees. I do not know of any objection that was raised—it has not been brought to my attention—to any sitting of a committee today, the date for this debate having been fixed last week, because such a sitting would in any way collide with the fact we have today a debate on an amendment to the constitution.

Mr. Robichaud: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker: I did raise an objection in the committee on mines and technical surveys yesterday.

[Later:]

Mr. G. J. McIlraith (Ottawa West): I would like to direct a question to the Prime Minister based on a reference he made earlier to the business of the house, and in particular to a statement or commitment he gave to the house on February 13, 1959, when he said this, as reported on page 990 of *Hansard*:

I for one will say unequivocally that if at any time there is any action taken that would deny members of the opposition a fair opportunity of discharging their responsibility—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It seems to me the hon. member is endeavouring rather to debate the question than to ask a question. If he has a question asking for information of fact and can put it, he is in order.

Mr. McIlraith: My question is as to the conduct of the business of the house with particular reference to today's business, and I think that is an appropriate subject.

Mr. Speaker: It would be appropriate if the hon. member asked the question without reading from *Hansard*.