

Justice and Legal Affairs Committee

occupy the front benches on the government side of this house.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I find myself compelled to support the mild arguments of the last speaker, because the responsibility to which he refers in my opinion does fall squarely upon the shoulders of the government. In support of this argument I should like to quote from the statement the Prime Minister made yesterday. He said, as reported at page 4626 of *Hansard*:

One of these pressures is our ability to get things done, to adapt our procedures to the requirements, and the struggle in this regard is often referred to as a deterioration of parliamentary action—

I think Your Honour is well aware that the committee on procedure, which was set up last year, brought in a series of recommendations after a great deal of hard and zealous effort. One of the recommendations of this committee—and it seems to me this should be perfectly obvious to anyone who has examined the situation—related to the fact that often 24 or 25 committees were suddenly handed a large amount of work with terms of reference requiring them to complete their tasks as quickly as possible. A proposal was made to cover this situation. It is perfectly obvious at this time, under the conditions which now exist, that we are not going to be able to perform the detailed work that has been set out for us. I think everyone will agree that something less than perfection exists in this parliament.

With those facts in mind I think the government fell short of accepting its responsibility when it rejected many of the recommendations of the special committee on procedure as to how these committees should operate under conditions which now exist. The committees are short of personnel, short of adequately equipped rooms with simultaneous translation facilities and short of trained staff. In terms of logistics it is impossible for all these committees to operate efficiently.

While the government has implemented certain procedures along the lines of suggestions made by the committee on procedure, I should like to point out that at this time committee hearings have only just started. Very shortly the estimates of the current fiscal year will be considered by eight or ten committees, which at this time have inadequate facilities with which to operate efficiently. Surely it is incumbent upon this government, if we are going to overcome the

[Mr. Kindt.]

present crisis, to immediately direct its attention and energy to these difficulties. It is the government's responsibility to solve these problems, and for that reason I support the motion.

• (3:10 p.m.)

I should like to make one further suggestion which should be borne in mind when we are dealing with the committee problems relating to their ability to obtain quorums. These are not decision making committees. They are examining committees, the decisions are interlocutory in nature, and the decisions and recommendations they make come back to this house for final decision. I think no great harm is done by reducing the quorum to a number adequate to conduct the examinations which need to be conducted for the purpose for which the committees are established. Whether we have eight or 12 members I submit is immaterial, because decisions made in the committees have to be reconfirmed in this house.

I think it is positively scandalous to have prevailing the situations which have prevailed in the past, when civil servants with important jobs to do are called before a committee, compelled to wait a long period of time, and then are called back again if no quorum is established, sometimes the next day, to the detriment of their own work. I think what is suggested now is only an ad hoc solution, but I believe we should agree to it. In the meantime I hope the government will direct its attention to this problem and come up with some alternatives.

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, shortly after the opening of this session of parliament the house adopted, on a trial basis for the duration of this session, a series of amendments to the rules of procedure. Included in those amendments was a revision of the committee structure.

Following the adoption of the revised committee structure the government referred a great deal more work to committees than has been usual. I think it was said in the house at the time the rules were adopted that the reason for their adoption on a trial basis only was to get experience with them, knowing full well that there may be a requirement for amending them before their adoption on a permanent basis.

These new rules may well be a major breakthrough in bringing the practices of this house in line with the demands that modern