

Motion for Concurrence in Report

usually on Mondays and Wednesdays but in any case at the call of the Chair.

This piece about the quorum is really most interesting. The quorum is to consist of the member or members who happen to be present. Mr. Speaker, we met in camera, I know, but once the meetings are all over surely what is in the minutes of the committee becomes public property. I must say that when I saw the first draft it read that the members present should constitute a quorum. The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) said he wanted it to read "member or members". I confess that I laughed. I thought he was joking. But he was serious. He said he wanted it written in that way in order that members of the opposition parties could not make this committee ineffective by boycotting its meetings. But the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton stood up this afternoon and said it was inconceivable that opposition house leaders would not co-operate in this new regime. He said it was inconceivable that any opposition house leader would not come to these meetings and try to work things out. If it is so inconceivable, why cast this reflection on opposition house leaders by suggesting that some of them are going to boycott this whole affair and that the proceedings of parliament will bog down?

● (5:50 p.m.)

I suggest that this provision simply cannot stay there. I would like to see the whole of 16-A thrown out, but if it is going to stay some changes will have to be made. One is this business about the quorum consisting of the member or members who happen to be present. The Leader of the Opposition said that the President of the Privy Council could hold a meeting in the morning while he was taking a shower.

An hon. Member: And throw the baby out with the bath water.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Somebody says, "and throw the baby out with the bath water," but it was a shower that the Leader of the Opposition was talking about.

There is another item in that rule that will require a little more consideration. Farther on there is a reference to the distinction between reports made unanimously and reports that are not unanimous. Mr. Speaker, can you not see an interesting point of order arising some day if this recommendation goes through?

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

The government house leader comes in and says: "This motion is made pursuant to a unanimous decision of the committee." We, the other three house leaders, get up and say, "Oh, unanimous? We weren't there." But he says he was there, he was the quorum.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We will have no corroborative evidence, but he will ask us to believe that he agreed with himself. So we have a unanimous report brought in by one member of a four member committee and whatever he proposes has to be decided immediately without debate. The only possible delay there can be is that if ten of us stand up and object we can have a recorded vote. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this way of dealing with the business of a free parliament goes even beyond the ridiculous.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton has a nice way with words. You know, Mr. Speaker, when he got to this point today wasn't it lovely the way he put it? He said: If there is a breakdown, a disagreement among party leaders, then of course the government must be confronted with its responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): You can't beat it, Mr. Speaker. What he was really saying was that in the final analysis they control parliament, in the final analysis they are the masters of the house, in the final analysis they over there have the complete say and the opposition can go jump in the lake.

The rest of this proposed standing order 16-A is quite clear. The house leaders meet. If there are occasions when they are in agreement then under this rule, of course, their report is brought in on a Thursday and there can be no debate. The house decides on it right away. We accept that. If there is agreement we think this is the way it ought to be done.

One of the things lacking in recent years is that it has been possible for the house leaders to reach agreement among themselves but there has been no way to give effect to that agreement so far as the business of the house is concerned unless that agreement has been made an order of the house by unanimous consent. As a house leader I recognize the responsibility that will go with that position when a recommendation of this kind is going