

Concurrence in Committee Report

Indian agent for some time because the gentleman resigned or was transferred, has passed a motion to the effect that they will go ahead themselves and appoint their own agent, and to heck with the federal government.

I fully support that attitude. In many cases it would be just as well to have the Indian agents chosen by the Indians because this was the original concept. I only point to that as an example of the great dissatisfaction developing among Indian people. Their dissatisfaction is noticeable across the land. There was the massive march of the Wabasca people a while ago and the march of the people of the Cowichan reserve on Vancouver island who, trying to obtain redress for their housing problems, tried to march to the Indian affairs branch headquarters in Vancouver. It is shown by the situation on the St. Regis reserve, and by the complete collapse and blow-up of community development.

All these things show that there is a festering discontent. The time has long passed when parliament and the government can ignore the demand of the Indian people to do things for themselves. To look at the interests of the Indian people was the concept the committee members had last year. If the committee had had an opportunity to visit the Indians, to see some of these communities, undoubtedly it would have been able to speed alterations and changes in our Indian legislation. May I say in passing that when we heard the Prime Minister declare the business for this and the subsequent session a few days ago it was a matter of extreme regret to me and many others that he made no reference whatever to Indian affairs. This is another indication of the lack of interest of the government in this matter.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I also have been disturbed by what has happened in this committee. I intend to support the motion because it may do something to remedy the damage that has been done. The difficulty that has arisen in this committee and in the committee system generally arises from the fact that the whole system has broken down. Too many committees have sat at the same time. There have been too many meetings and too many members trying to be in two places at once and not managing to do so. Too many committees have travelled at a time when other committees have been trying to sit.

This committee, as has been said several times, made an effort to organize itself to

[Mr. Howard.]

make trips to Indian reserves. Departmental officials tried to organize the trips in some instances but the results were not satisfactory. The timetable was too short. Frankly, the members did not co-operate to make these trips a success.

I support the motion only because, by reducing the number of members who will go to Indian reserves, something may now be done. It was well that the hon. member for Skeena raised this point because he has shown not only what has happened in this committee but what has happened to many committees of the house during the session. The whole affair has been badly managed. Too many committees have sat at the same time and too few members have been able to attend each committee. I believe that all of us have to reconsider our position in connection with committees. If the members on the government side in charge of the organization of committees cannot arrange to cut down their number, then we shall have to insist on more members making a tremendous effort to get to these meetings.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I believe I am a member of five or six committees and sub-committees, but I find that the situation in this particular committee is the worst of all. I understand that through no fault of the chairman or of any individual it has been jammed in with other committees. This has led to a bad experience for those who serve on it, and for the Indians, too. On at least one occasion, and perhaps on two, the Indian representatives were prepared to appear before the committee and the meeting had to be cancelled.

I support the motion, and I certainly hope that in the new session a great deal more thought will be given to the amount of committee work members of this house can handle. The number of these committees will have to be reduced, and members will have to attend the meetings better if they are to be successful.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): I wish to support the proposition advanced by the hon. member for Skeena and referred to by the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, and I want to do so in a non-partisan fashion. Behind the bland façade of this motion lies one of the most shameful chapters in Canadian history.

The intent of this committee, approved by the minister, constituted a genuine effort on the part of members of this house to direct attention in a really positive way to some constructive suggestions. The trouble is there