

this bill back to the committee for further consideration, because I was in sympathy to a large extent with the views of the honourable senator from De la Durantaye (Hon. Mr. Pouliot). I think if we had sent the bill back to the committee we probably could have worked out a wording satisfactory to the sponsor and the Government and to ourselves, but in the Senate I was prevented from discussing it.

I think honourable senators will agree that when an amendment to a clause is proposed it is better to go into Committee of the Whole or else to a standing committee, where we can all ask as many questions as we like, with a view to amending the clause as we think best.

I accept most graciously the ruling of His Honour. I know what the rule is in the House of Commons, for I presided over that house for some years, but I must say I did not realize that a contrary practice had been established in this house. I would suggest that whenever we follow that practice we should be very careful to give full consideration to the proposed amendment.

Hon. Arthur W. Roebuck: Honourable senators, may I have your indulgence to say just a word, because the subject under discussion has a good deal of interest.

In the Commons the practice of referring bills to the Committee of the Whole operates most advantageously. Bills are introduced and sponsored in that house by the minister who is responsible for their preparation. In Committee of the Whole he has by his side, as a rule, his Parliamentary Assistant, and, seated in front of him, two senior members of his department. He is therefore in a position to answer all questions that may be put to him.

But how different is the situation here! We have one member of the cabinet in the Senate. Usually the Leader of the Government in the Senate is a member of the cabinet, who is generally, but not always, a minister without portfolio. No matter how industrious he may be it is impossible for him to occupy the position successively, bill after bill, of all the ministers in the other house. He is not able to answer questions as they are. In consequence of that, and I think this is the main reason why we act as we do, we refer legislation to a standing committee, where we are free to question the minister of the department concerned, or the deputy minister, and departmental officials. We are also open to hear representations from the public at large. In that way our facilities for the examination of legislation are at least equal to those enjoyed by members of the other house.

I have frequently heard compliments paid to the Senate for the courtesy with which we

conduct our standing committee meetings, and I am impressed also that we are very effective indeed as we sit around the table at these standing committees and discuss terms of the bills and the conditions which have brought them about.

For the reasons I have stated we usually do not refer bills to the Committee of the Whole. We can do so; and, as was pointed out earlier, we can send a bill to a Standing Committee and later refer it to the Committee of the Whole, but that procedure does not work very well. Since I have been in this house we have sometimes gone into Committee of the Whole, but the result was not as satisfactory as it is in the other house, and therefore I think our present method is very good.

I hope there will be no movement to draw the rules too tight in regard to amendments of and discussion on bills reported back to the Senate from standing committees. We do not need rigid rules in this house because every one of us here is an experienced parliamentarian. We sit as long as we like, there is no rule on the length of our speeches, and I do not think I have ever known a speech here that was really too long. The courtesy with which we carry on is not only delightful to ourselves but I think it is approved by the country at large.

Hon. Jean-François Pouliot: Honourable senators, I appreciate the fact that there are several standing orders of the Senate with regard to the sittings of the Committee of the Whole in the Senate, and I regret not to share the views of those who have said that bills should not be brought before the Committee of the Whole. It is an institution that we have established by our rules. Nothing prevents a minister of the Government or any official from coming to the Senate to answer questions which may be put during a sitting of the Committee of the Whole. About one-half of the senators who do not belong to the Banking and Commerce Committee are discriminated against when a bill is submitted to that committee instead of to the Committee of the Whole. To that objection it is answered that members may attend the committee and they will be allowed to ask questions. It is not a right, but a certain permission which is given.

Hon. Mr. Roebuck: No, it is a right.

Hon. Mr. Pouliot: They are not at ease, they are not in the same position as if they were members of the committee. The purpose of the Committee of the Whole is to enable all honourable senators to get illuminating answers from the Government or from the officials.