

Justice and Legal Affairs Committee

to support what has been said by the hon. member for Wellington South. This year parliament is operating under a new set of rules. We are trying them out, and apparently the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre feels very badly that some of the rules which he helped to revise have not worked out perfectly. I am rather surprised at this, since the hon. member has been a member of this house for a long time—

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member not aware of the fact that this particular rule was brought in by the government; I had no hand in it at all.

Mr. Nesbitt: The hon. member says he had no hand in it. Perhaps he did not directly, but as we all are aware his advice may have been sought on the matter. What I am getting at is this. When we are trying out new things I think we have to be pragmatic about the matter.

In respect of one of the important committees of this house, of which I am vice chairman, we have found it very difficult indeed to get the required quorum for the very reasons which have been expressed by the other hon. members, such as other committees meeting at the same time and the like. I think I would agree with the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra that perhaps it may be necessary for the house to start considering reducing the quorum of all committees and other things. That is fine, but these things take time, as we know, and we may not get around to approving these things in this house for weeks.

The fact of the matter is that certain committees, the one which is chaired by the hon. member for High Park, the one chaired by the hon. member for Wellington South, and other committees—and I suspect the committee of which I am vice chairman may be making a similar request—have work to do which they want to get done. Everybody is complaining about parliament not getting down to its work. These committees want to get the work done which is before them. If they have to wait for quorums for the many reasons which have been set out, this delays their work and the work of the house.

If we wait until parliament gets around to revising the rules in respect of all committees, we may wait until doomsday. I would hope that the motion by the hon. member for High Park would be supported, and that similar motions in respect of other committees would be supported in the same way. If at a later date we wish to revise the general rules with regard to committees, that is fine,

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

but in the meantime let us have the committees which have work to do, get to work.

● (3:00 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Langlois (Mégantic): Mr. Speaker, after listening attentively to the arguments presented by the various members on all sides of the house, and attending some committees, I feel I may properly say that the problem of adequate attendance or quorum at the committees is real.

On the other hand, I noted that the government always has a majority of members on these committees. In some committees then, the lack of attendance is not often due to members of the opposition, but to the members of the party in power.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Langlois (Mégantic): I hear exclamations but it is a fact. I shall give an example among others.

At the committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts quite a few were present, more than the total membership of 24. Nevertheless, there was no quorum for the simple reason that members of the opposition are restricted to a certain number who may sit on the committee. The members of the party in power were the absentees.

I am aware that some were in attendance at other committees. But before concurring in the reduction of the quorum I would ask that the whole policy of attendance on the committees be revised. It would do away with certain insinuations we heard during the last election campaign, namely that such and such a member never shows up in the committees. It became a political football and I should not like to have the same thing happen again in an election campaign.

A few moments ago a government member requested that the quorum of the committees be reduced. Before accepting such a proposition I would call for a full revision of the committees policy, with a view to determining whether there should not be less members on the committees or better representation of the various parties. It seems to me this should be considered.

This also proves that perhaps it would be better to adjourn the house for a week so as to allow the committees to do their work.

It has always been recognized that a human being cannot be present in two different places at the same time, and fulfil a double duty.