

committees by this House. I have been a member of the finance committee and other committees and I suggest that the carte blanche demands made by certain committees at the beginning of a session are made without any justification whatsoever. The hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) might have presented within his report the scheme in respect of these proposals.

An hon. Member: That was done weeks ago.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): It was not done to the House. It was possibly done to committee members, but not to the House. I suggest that in a report in which a committee seeks authority to travel it should outline what it intends to do. It is not only a question of the cost involved. I remember an occasion last year when the former government House Leader complained bitterly to me about the travels of some of the committees and the fact that three committees were away simultaneously for some legitimate but uncontrolled purpose.

The point is that there is no co-ordination. Committees simply ask for authority at the beginning of a session, obtain it and spin off like independent satellites. But that is not the way the committees should operate nor is it the way this committee should operate. I suggest that the members of the committee consider dividing the committee into two or even three subcommittees in order to accomplish its purpose. Last summer the finance committee was split into subcommittees and this resulted in much less strain on the committee. Because the number of members was less numerous they were able to participate better in the discussions and considerations than would have been the case had the committee as a whole visited the places which were visited. If this were the suggestion in this case it might eliminate half the objection. May I call it one o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It being one o'clock I do now leave the Chair until two o'clock.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

• (2:00 p.m.)

AFTER RECESS

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, before the recess I had been talking about the necessity of the House maintaining control of the committees. My particular objections were to blanket authorization to travel at the beginning of the term. It seems to me that the committee certainly has reason to travel. Many of the committees have very legitimate reasons, and some more so than others. But it must be remembered that the House has control over committees, not the committees over the House. Therefore, if a committee wishes to travel to accomplish its purpose, it should come to the House and explain the purpose of travelling. A committee that has a legitimate purpose will find the House quite receptive to the idea.

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It must be remembered that information in the hands of committee members is not information in the possession of the House. The minutes of proceedings and evidence of the committees and their reports reach us three or four weeks later, hopefully in the future much sooner. Therefore I say that I believe in this case this embroglio would not have occurred if more information had been disclosed and had been properly laid out.

I have suggested—and I think this may be possible—that the committee divide itself into subcommittees. This will eliminate a great deal of the logistics and of the expense. I would say that it would also improve the performance of committee members who will then be able to participate in the meetings. It is obvious to me from my experience last year and this year, more particularly the meetings last summer of the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs which heard briefs in various provincial capitals, that if you have 30 members in a committee and these members want to question the witnesses, they will have to be severely restricted with regard to their questioning. This is the case even when there are only 10 members in a sub-committee. If there were 30 members of the House it would be terribly frustrating in Parliament and as I said in Committee. Also, I suggest that some of the centres which the committee might wish to visit may have difficulty in accommodating 45 or 50 people, as would be proposed. In one case, for example, this logistics train that went out with the committee on its one excursion was almost equivalent to the number of members participating. For this reason, I feel we must rethink the whole matter of committee activities.

My colleagues and I are not opposed to the idea of this committee travelling. I want to disabuse the mind of any hon. member who may suggest that this is so. But we are objecting to the procedure that was followed. This has also given us an opportunity to make some other observations with regard to the conduct and structure of committees.

Last year I heard complaints from the Government House Leader that many times he was not able to schedule the work before the House because the people who were primarily concerned with a particular bill were members of a committee that was off somewhere. At one time we had the ludicrous situation of three committees being away on tours. Of course, this makes work here and in other committees absolutely impossible. There has to be much better scheduling of the activities of the committees. It is not so bad at the beginning of the session, but I must plead for better planning than we had last year when 15, and sometimes 17, committees were sitting on the same day. How can we then be expected to carry on our duties in the House? It is just not possible.

I would also lay down a further caveat, that it should not be permissible for a committee to hold sittings while the House is sitting if the committee is hearing evidence from government officials. If we are dealing with witnesses from the outside, from the public, this can be done for their convenience and as a courtesy which we extend to them. However, in so far as the other hearings are concerned, our duties are here.