

Privilege

that perhaps I was wrong. I immediately thought that maybe I was and backtracked a little bit, saying that perhaps I was wrong, that I had nothing to back my suggestion up that for many years, for generations of parliamentarians, we have had special committees, standing committees, joint committees, many kinds of committees, sitting at the same time as the House was sitting either as the House or in committee of the whole.

I have since consulted authorities on the subject, hon. members and others who have been in this institution for many years and others who have experience of the history of our Parliament over a period of 100 years, and with great humility may I say that my suggestion of yesterday has been confirmed. It has been suggested to me that not one year has gone by since confederation when this kind of situation has not happened, that is to say, where we have had special committees or standing committees of the House sitting in competition, if I may use that word, with the committee of the whole.

I really find it difficult to conceive in my mind why it should be worse or more offensive to the concept of parliamentary privilege to have a committee sit while the House is in committee of the whole than it is for a committee to sit while the House is sitting as the House itself. I just cannot understand or conceive that the committee of the whole is more important than the House itself. This is the suggestion that is being made in the motion moved by the hon. member, that we should not have standing committees sitting while the committee of the whole sits. He is suggesting that although standing committees should and could sit while the House is meeting, they should not and could not sit while the House is sitting as a committee of the whole. This I find extremely difficult to accept.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Except for the votes.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member makes the same protest as was made yesterday, but I would suggest to the hon. member for Edmonton West and to other hon. members who may want to protest that this has been a practice of the House for 100 years. It may well be that we have been wrong all along. I am not saying that we have not been in error in past years and that the practice should not be changed. What I do suggest to hon. members is that this practice has been established for a long time.

Should we change the rules if there is something wrong with our practice? It may well be that we should change the practice. But hon. members know that the new Standing Order 65(8) has been approved by the House. This change was recommended by a committee of which the Speaker was not a member. I might say that in those years I thought the Speaker should have been a member of the committee, but ever since then I have thanked the good Lord that I was never a member of that committee because every time points of order were raised I would have considered myself personally involved. I can now deny all responsibility for any of the decisions that were made. But not having been a member of the committee and, at the same time, distinguished members of all parties of the House having been members of the committee and having made recommendations

[Mr. Speaker.]

to the House which were accepted by the House of Commons, I find it difficult to accept the contention that the rule should be changed simply by order or ruling on the part of the Chair. Certainly I do not want to give my judgment priority over the judgment of that committee. It was a very good committee which made what were, I thought, valid recommendations in some respects in any event, which recommendations were accepted by the House.

I say all of this in a general way. This is my natural reaction to the point that has been raised by the hon. member for St. John's East. I said yesterday that I thought there might be a very legitimate grievance in the sense that there should be an effort made by the different House Leaders to get together and make sure that we do not put ourselves in the position of having a very important bill before the House requiring members to be present because of the vote and other situations while at the same time there are three important committees sitting in competition with the sitting of the House.

● (2:20 p.m.)

I believe that there is something awkward, something wrong, with that position. Should it be changed by the type of motion that has now been proposed by the hon. member for St. John's East? I doubt it very much. I would think this might be the kind of situation that should be looked into by the Committee on Procedure and Organization rather than by another committee of the House. I would be prepared to look into the matter because of all of this and because of the very interesting point made by the hon. member. I am not prepared to make a ruling now but to look into the matter further, study the situation and make a ruling in due course.

In passing I might refer to the point made by the hon. member that Standing Order 5 requires that an hon. member shall attend the service of the House. I have always thought, and I still do, that the service of the House is discharged by an hon. member whether he attends the House as it is at present, the committee of the whole or a standing committee of the House. I believe this Standing Order requires that there be service of the House, and for many reasons I would think that hon. members do not hesitate to consider themselves as having attended the service of the House at the end of a month when they have been attending meetings of standing committees. I say this by way of passing comment. The point is very important and fundamental and requires the consideration of the Chair rather than merely passing or fleeting remarks such as those I am making now.

I am prepared to follow the suggestion of the hon. member for St. John's East and the suggestions made during the short debate we had yesterday that this matter be considered. My thought was that I would attempt to have a meeting of House Leaders. I am prepared to have such a meeting either today or tomorrow to see whether we might as the House of Commons and parliamentarians together find a solution to the problem which will be acceptable and will satisfy hon. members