

*Select Standing Committees*

I would refer very briefly to the provisions in Great Britain relating to special committees, or what are called there select committees. At pages 80-81 of the Manual of Procedure in the Public Business of the House of Commons of Great Britain for 1912, under the heading *Select Committees*, I quote the following:

A select committee is a committee appointed by the House to consider or take evidence upon any bill or matter and to report their opinion for the information and assistance of the House.

And further on:

A select committee must not, without the leave of the House, consist of more than 15 members.

That is all which I think it is necessary for me to quote in this connection. It seems to me that we are faced with this situation, that from time to time in this House committees meet infrequently to consider matters not of prime importance and not requiring any special investigation, but in which the opinion of a considerable number of the members is perhaps desirable. In such cases I believe that a large committee is entirely proper, and I do not desire to argue that there should be any reduction in

5. p.m. the size of committees of that character. But some of the standing committees in this House, and practically all of the special committees, that have been appointed, are required to concentrate very intensively upon certain important matters and to give those matters prolonged and careful consideration extending over weeks and months. In those cases it is in my judgment very desirable that the committee should be smaller in number so that it would be possible for members to attend regularly; a very large percentage of attendance being in such circumstances essential. If such is not done there will prevail a condition of affairs which in my judgment is disastrous to progress; that is to say, we shall have members who, either because they cannot or do not want to attend certain committees, are available merely for voting purposes in case of need. Members can be swung from one committee to another in case of a vote, and it does seem to me highly undesirable that there should be a vote upon any matter of great importance by a member who either does not care to attend a committee regularly or is unable to do so. I could cite some cases that have come under my observation in this House, and I would seriously recommend that the whole matter be gone into carefully, and that we take into consideration the probable nature of the work of the various committees, and adjust the membership

[Mr. Good.]

accordingly. Of course, one difficulty occurs in that connection: from time to time certain committees will have relatively few meetings and relatively inconsequential business during a particular session, and the next year very important business. But surely in view of the situation some attempt might be made to adjust the membership to meet the conditions existing at any time. I do not see why it is necessary that the membership of any committee should remain the same from year to year. If, for instance, the Banking and Commerce committee had before it such an important investigation as it had in 1923—or rather two important matters requiring about eighty meetings—it would have been advisable to reduce the membership so that those who attend may do so regularly and inform themselves in regard to the matters under consideration.

I do not wish to take up the time of the House further, but would suggest that in view of the appointment of the special committee to consider the rules, the question I have just submitted to the House might very properly be turned over to that committee for further investigation and report. And I sincerely trust that, after the question has received further consideration at the hands of this committee, something may be done to remedy what I think has been a very serious, and indeed a disastrous, state of affairs in regard to some of our important committees. The resolution standing in my name was drafted a considerable time ago and is therefore not just what I should like at the present time. I have therefore arranged with one of my friends to move an amendment which I shall gladly accept in order to dispose of the matter.

Mr. T. L. CHURCH (North Toronto): The hon. member for Brant (Mr. Good) has moved a resolution asking that the membership of select standing committees be reduced with a view to securing a more regular attendance as well as to promoting efficiency. When we look around the empty chamber today and see the House practically deserted, while academic questions are being discussed by some hon. gentlemen, it seems to me that the same reasoning with which the hon. member has supported his resolution might apply to the membership of the House itself, and that we might argue for the same reason that if the size of this House were reduced it would increase efficiency and secure better attendance. Not so. The size of the House or committees has nothing to do with efficiency or the number who attend. Members will not attend to hear trivial questions at the expense of dealing with up to date and