

Committee Procedure

intends to go that far. Indeed, I am sorry to say that I think his motives are somewhat less worthy than that in the sense that I think he is not speaking here as a statesman but as a politician, and I am sorry that he chooses to act as a politician in a matter which is of such basic importance to our country, a matter on which I think parliamentarians of all parties should speak with a united voice.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, it is not my intention to get into the argument which is taking place between the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and those on the other side of the House. With respect to the last remark of the last speaker, it seems to me that it is one we often hear. The other fellow is always the politician; the one who has the floor is always the statesman.

An hon. Member: It certainly is true in this case.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Is my hon. friend saying it is true right now?

An hon. Member: The previous speaker.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I cannot even get a compliment when I set it up and ask for it, because I am on the other side of the House.

Mr. Cullen: When you get to the Senate we'll call you a statesman.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Oh, my goodness! Not only are they unwilling to pay me a compliment; I am now being insulted.

Mr. Baldwin: That is a compliment.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I said when I first rose that I was not going to get into the argument. I am not sure there is much of an argument, when one pulls brushes aside the words and the epithets which are thrown back and forth. I think there is agreement on both sides that the general system of responsible government we have is a good one, and that on both sides of the House there is a desire that responsible government should really work.

I rose, however, because I have the feeling that one of the reasons why we have this kind of motion before us, and one of the reasons why we have had a number of discussions lately about how things proceed in committees is that there is a certain amount of unhappiness, certainly less than happiness, about the way some of our committees are functioning. We in this House are aware that the amount of business we have to do in the course of 12 months is so voluminous that it is not possible for all of it to be done here. This means we have to make greater use of the committees than has been the case in years gone by. If we are to make greater use of committees, they are going to have to work. Therefore when things happen in committees which we do not like, there is this feeling of unhappiness.

I want to speak only for a minute or two, and I will not go much longer than that, Madam Speaker, because you will probably wonder whether I am in order or not. I will

[Mr. MacGuigan.]

get it over before you rule me out. I just want to say that I think one of the reasons why there is unhappiness about committees and that this unhappiness produces this kind of motion, is that our committees are too crowded in their operations. This leads me to the pitch I have been making for a good many years, and that is why I took the floor today. I think we must organize our work so that there are occasions—for example, a week at a time—when the House does not sit, so that committees can be at the centre of the stage and have time to do their work without the members of those committees being concerned about having to be in the House or having to do other work on those days.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): This is not a new idea. I said that I have proposed it a good many times. I was not the first to propose it, but it seems to me that there is agreement that it is a good idea. I was applauded for it just now. There is agreement on this proposition, yet we never seem to get around to doing anything about it. The successful working of the committee system is important. That includes the right to question the witnesses who appear before them. But I think it is terribly important that we find better ways to accommodate the work of our committees, and I hope we will do something about this very soon.

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I just want to say that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) in a very statesmanlike speech made a suggestion with which I am in wholehearted agreement. I think there ought to be more time for committees so that they can function without having to worry about the operations of the House of Commons, which does tend to dominate their activities, particularly since the amount of work now going through committees and the importance of that work have become so fundamental to the proper functioning of the House of Commons.

I believe that the House of Commons has lost its capability to deal with the amount of work which has to be done. As a result, it will have to consider its own operations with a more clear eye as to what is actually going on, the kind of work which the government is increasingly putting before it, and the frustration of the House in not being able to process that work in a way which is becoming to the House, to the members, the committees and, indeed, to the institution of parliament.

● (1750)

I believe, therefore, that the motivation which has led to this particular resolution on the order paper is a genuine one. It stems from the frustration as to the proper relationship between the House of Commons and committees. It stems from a frustration that members feel about the operation of committees and the lack of knowledge as to what the powers, authority and privileges of the committees are vis-à-vis the House of Commons.

We have seen over the last week where His Honour the Speaker has had to deal with a number of motions hon. members have brought forward regarding conflicts in the standing committees. Many of us feel that the conflicts are