

*Public Accounts Committee*

while the house is in session, which involves a principle I have opposed for 13 years. However, Mr. Speaker, today out of necessity I support it, in view of the requirement that certain work referred by the House of Commons to the public accounts committee should be completed.

The Auditor General of Canada is not responsible to the government; he is responsible to the House of Commons. He files his reports with the House of Commons. The House of Commons does not deal with the reports of the Auditor General but refers them to the public accounts committee. At this session of parliament the House of Commons has referred to the public accounts committee the Auditor General's report for the fiscal year ending 1964, which contains 184 matters which the Auditor General thought the House of Commons should know about. The House of Commons has referred to the public accounts committee the report of the Auditor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1965, which contains 263 matters which should be considered by the House of Commons and the public accounts committee.

• (3:40 p.m.)

So there are now before the public accounts committee a total of 447 recommendations or matters of concern to us. Sir, in considering this, let me say that a decision has already been made by the public accounts committee to call witnesses from across Canada. It will be calling witnesses, not just the 10 or 12 in Ottawa, but from the crown corporations and from as far away as Halifax.

I say, sir, that even with a reduction in quorum to 10 members it is still absolutely essential that we bring in witnesses from across Canada to appear before this committee, under our order, or under our subpoena. In carrying on with the work of the committee, we must give reasonable consideration to the fact that these men and women will be called before us from across Canada. We cannot day by day decide that we should come to the House of Commons and ask for special permission to sit on the day we request permission, or the next day. I say, sir, that the public accounts committee should have the general authority to sit while the house is sitting, which I assure you, sir, will only be exercised under some extreme emergency.

[Translation]

**Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve):** Mr. Speaker, I have only a few remarks to make concerning the report presented by the chairman of the standing committee on public accounts.

In my opinion, the leaders of the various parties should consider the advisability of reducing the number of standing committees rather than the membership of those committees or the quorum required to allow them to sit.

It seems to me the various departments should be more concentrated and that fewer committees should be established in order to enable members of the house to attend their sittings. I cannot see any other solution at present. Even though the quorum or the membership of every committee were reduced, it would not provide a final solution, whereas decreasing the number of committees would enable the members interested in those committees to attend their meetings when the house is not sitting. I feel that it would then make the work of the house and of the committees much easier, because at the present time committees are unable to get the required quorum.

[English]

**Mr. Hales:** Mr. Speaker, I think we should agree to bring this debate to a close. We have spent considerable time on it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member needs the consent of the house to speak now because this is not a substantive motion, and he does not have the right of reply. However, in view of the fact that the hon. member has not availed himself of the opportunity to make a statement, I am sure the house will not mind his saying a few words at this time.

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Hales:** Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief. All points, I think, have been well covered. The standing committee on public accounts is asking for permission of the house to sit while the house is in session. There are three points which ought to be mentioned. The first is the terrific work load that is before the committee. The second is the fact that we have witnesses to call from all parts of the country, and accordingly we have to plan our meetings as far as one month or even more in advance. Third, as time has gone on we have been given a tremendous work load and we must get down to work.