

Standing Orders

opinion—think it is a good committee of the house. We think that during past years it has done some useful work. It could not have had the success it has achieved had it not been for the distinguished chairmanship of the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Bradette). As to the other estimates, I know there are arguments pro and con as to whether they should go to committees. I remember Mr. Neill, who sat for the constituency of Comox-Alberni, on one occasion, after I had raised the question of sending the estimates to committees, said to me: You had better be careful, young man, because you are in opposition; and this is no kind of proposal to come from the opposition benches.

That may be so. Nevertheless, it seems to me that we have two things to consider when we are deciding whether we should send the estimates to committees. First of all, we may as well admit right now that our whole committee set-up is out of date and is, to a large extent, a useless appendage appearing in our *Hansards* in the early part of the session. Some of the committees never meet at all. They are completely out of date. So far as the committees relate to the various departments of government, I am not so sure that we should not now consider having our standing committees set up with some relation to the matters that those committees will be investigating or those various items of legislation that are brought in by the ministers. As it is now, often one does not know to what committee something should be sent, because the committee set-up is so far out of date. You do not know whether matters should be sent to one committee or the other. I am strongly of the view that we should now make some attempt to alter our entire set-up with regard to the standing committees. The present set-up, in my opinion, is a relic of the horse and buggy days. Just because this was the way a thing happened to be done at the beginning of this century, I do not see why we should still be carrying on with these relics of the past.

There is a real job to be done in connection with our committees, having regard to changing the structure of them. When that is done, then of course you have a good chance to send the estimates of a particular minister's department to the appropriate committee. For instance, if you have a standing committee on public works, the estimates of the genial Minister of Public Works (Mr. Fournier) would, of course, be referred to that committee, provided that the house so agreed; and so it would go all down the line. Having that procedure in mind, it would seem to me that we could remove from the House of Commons a good deal of time-consuming debate on certain questions. If you go through

Hansard some time, you can observe the kind of questions that are asked of the ministers in the committee of the whole, and the answers that are given; and you will find that there is not much wonder that there are a great many members who are not in the chamber at those times. The taxpayers in the galleries say: Why are they all out, and why do only a few show any interest in the proceedings? The answer is this. You have one minister there, and you have half a dozen questioners who are interested in that particular line of work; other people who may be interested in something else altogether, of course, await their turn on some other occasion. Nevertheless, a large part of the committee's work in parliament is taken up in the discussion of matters in which only a few members are or can be interested. Instead of that procedure, I suggest that if we had our estimates going to standing committees, we would have every single member of the house somewhere on those committees, taking his place, and we would thereby eliminate all the boredom that from time to time is expressed by backbenchers because of having nothing to do, not being able to speak and not being able to take their proper part in administering the affairs of the nation. Right there in those committees they would have their chance to speak, to do a job for parliament, for the constituencies and for the country. From the backbencher's point of view particularly, I think that suggestion has great attractiveness.

It may be that we should not take the whole of the estimates of every department out of the committee of the whole. I know that there are some arguments that can be adduced both for and against that course. But after the administrative item has been debated in the committee of the whole—and this item gives every member a good chance to speak, whether he happens to be on any particular standing committee or not—and after it has been passed by the committee, the detailed estimates following could readily go to the standing committees that I would suggest. In a sense that would be a compromise between those who want everything to go to a committee and those who want to have everything dealt with in the committee of the whole house.

Mr. Weir: May I ask my hon. friend a question?

Mr. Graydon: Yes.

Mr. Weir: I have two things in mind, one dealing with matters after they have been accepted—and by that I mean reports of committees the following year—and one dealing with matters of policy before committees.