

Justice and Legal Affairs Committee

sustain 22 committees meeting and all attempting to get their work done. The size of committees is obviously too large, and should be reduced. The basic problem facing this house is that we are attempting to operate far too many committees with far too many members needed for a quorum.

• (2:50 p.m.)

We must face the question of a reduction in the size of committees, and of more efficient committees, in order to get that work done. With respect to the motion moved by the hon. member for High Park, I want to say that what is good for one committee surely is good for all committees, and we in the House of Commons should not be picking apart our committee procedure piecemeal. We should act in a concerted fashion to correct something which I believe is wrong in our committee procedure.

I would appeal to parliament today to take one more look at our committee procedure, and if it needs adjustment in the size of committees—and I believe it does—then we should move quickly to make that adjustment and increase the effectiveness of the procedure, without going to the trouble of having one committee, a second, and a third coming back to the house for a reduction in size and for permission to sit while the house is sitting.

If all 22 committees were to meet while the house was sitting the House of Commons would lose its own quorum. Therefore if committees are to meet when the house is sitting there must be an orderly scheduling program for them which could be, in fact would have to be, a matter of a proper arrangement in the house satisfactory to both sides. Therefore I believe this motion should not be passed today but that some means should be found to immediately look at this question of the size of committees and their efficiency in relation to the number of committees that must operate.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington South): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion of the hon. member for High Park, and I do so for various reasons. The very fact that this committee system has been rearranged from what it was in former years, with two or more committees meeting at the same time and with two or more members expected to attend meetings of two committees, it is humanly impossible for this to be done. Therefore I say that the request to reduce the quorum from 13 to 10 is very reasonable in

view of the fact that the quorum fixed for a meeting of this house, which has a membership of 265, is only 20.

In this case we have a committee of 24 and a set quorum of 13. It does not seem reasonable to have such a high quorum as 13, and I speak from some experience in this matter. I speak as chairman of one committee which had to adjourn on two occasions because of the lack of a quorum. On investigating the reason we found it was due to the fact that in one instance two members, and in the second four members, were on another committee which was meeting at the same time. They were torn between the two, not knowing which meeting they should attend.

My hon. friend suggests that we could get more work done through committees. I agree with him, but I suggest that if we had a quorum of 10 we could get more work done because committees could start on time. I think all chairmen of committees would agree with me that we have had to wait 15 minutes, 20 minutes and even half an hour to get a quorum, but if the quorum were reduced to 10 we could start on time.

In the case of the public accounts committee of which I am chairman we have a tremendous amount of work to complete. We have the 1964 report of the Auditor General. We also have his 1965 report before us, and we are most anxious to get on with the work. I feel that a quorum of 10 would assist greatly.

There are many legitimate reasons why members cannot be present at committee meetings. They may be serving on parliamentary delegations to international meetings. They may be sick. There are various reasons why they cannot attend, and I believe it would be a good idea if some provision could be made whereby in such cases they could name alternates to attend committees for them. However, I must stick to the point regarding the quorum and not go into that aspect of the question.

I think the house, recognizing the points I have put before it and the fact that other committee chairmen think the same way, should see fit to endorse the motion moved by the hon. member for High Park. I have a similar motion standing in my name; therefore it has been a privilege for me to speak on behalf of the hon. member's motion and also on my own behalf in this regard.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I should like very briefly to support the motion of the hon. member for High Park, and also