

Public Accounts Committee

demand, leaving perhaps no members to attend in this chamber at all, and an unhappy situation would develop.

I will not oppose this request any further Mr. Speaker, but as I say I think the situation will deteriorate very rapidly. I am sure the public will soon become aware of the fact that we have been creating new rules without really paying continuous attention to the problems which have developed. It seems to me that under these new rules we are putting ourselves into a worse position than we were under the old rules. So while I am opposed to this step, we must be prepared to put ourselves in the position of restricting ourselves further without once again changing the whole committee structure. But I warn hon. members to be cautious about such changes as these which are not made on an over-all basis. We should take the initiative right away of sitting down in our business committee and making over-all plans which are of much more advantage to members of parliament and to the country as well as to the new committee system, which I say should be given a fair chance to succeed. It is not now being given that fair chance.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Caron (Hull): Mr. Speaker, on this matter, I must say that I was probably the first to object to committees meeting while the house is sitting. This evil has existed for a long time. We objected to it while we were in opposition and I remember that, at the time, the present ministers were with us and objected to the committees meeting while the house was sitting, because we could not properly serve two masters, namely the committees and the house.

According to the division yesterday, 239 members voted. If we had thirteen members for each sitting committee, this would call for a total of 299 members. Thus, with 236 or 239 members, there would not be enough. If the number of members per committee is reduced to 10, the total is brought down to 230. Subtract from this figure the number of ministers who are not members of the committees but whose names only appear, and we would not have enough members to sit in the house.

I have suggested before that Wednesdays be reserved for committee meetings, so that the committees may sit sensibly. But we are asked that the house permit committees to meet while the house is sitting. I submit we

[Mr. Peters.]

should not allow it. If a committee has special reasons, witnesses to be heard, in short if it is convenient, permission may be granted. Any committee can always ask permission to sit.

The other way I feel it is asking too much. For these reasons, I object, unless permission is asked to sit.

The other day it was requested that a committee be permitted to meet during the sittings of the house. It met once and has not met for the rest of the week. Permission had been asked to meet while the house was sitting.

Today, we are in a bad position. The government should seek to improve the situation, not by changing the rules but by designing acceptable rules. If time is needed for the committees to meet, let the house adjourn. We surely cannot sit at the same time on the committees and in the house. It is a physical impossibility.

To this end, I shall ask for a vote and then I shall be through speaking on the question.

[English]

Mr. Harold E. Winch (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I was keenly interested in the motion moved by the hon. member for High Park and the motion which followed, moved by the chairman of the public accounts committee. I did not speak on either. The motions were carried on division and are now orders of the house. However, in view of the discussion which is now taking place on the second report of the standing committee on public accounts I feel I must say a few words.

In the 13 years that I have had the honour of sitting in this chamber as a member of the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, I have always firmly opposed any reduction in the quorum of a committee below the accepted figure, and any suggestion that the committee should sit while the house is sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hope I have not risen for nothing, but I should like to take the liberty of reminding the hon. member that the first motion has now been carried, and his remarks should be limited to the subject matter of the second motion.

Mr. Winch: Mr. Speaker, I should have thought, in view of the position I have taken in this House of Commons for 13 years, I could be allowed to say two sentences without being called to order by Your Honour. What is now before us is the question of the right of the public accounts committee to sit