

Mines, Forests and Waters Committee

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, perhaps there has been more than one unfortunate statement made during the course of this short debate. I will try not—

Some hon. Members: To make another one.

Mr. Chevrier: —to adopt the same combative manner which my hon. friend across the way has adopted.

I do, however, resent very strongly the statement made a moment ago by the hon. member for Lambton West that our attendance in this house is not what it should be, particularly having regard to our small numbers. I would recall to the hon. member, and as well as to the house leader across the way, that on an auspicious occasion not very long ago, which I shall not name, the house was almost empty and the benches on the other side of the house were certainly far from being filled as they should have been for that very formal occasion.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): It was the same on both sides of the house. Your leader was not even in the chamber.

Mr. Pearkes: You were not in.

Mr. Pallett: The house was not in session.

Mr. Chevrier: What was that again?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): It was the same on both sides of the house.

Mr. Chevrier: The point that has been raised by the hon. member for Ottawa West is well taken. While the house leader may be correct in saying that the power requested is not normally an extraordinary power, it is extraordinary having regard to the circumstances in which the house finds itself at the present time.

Mr. Fraser: How does it find itself? It is no different.

Mr. Chevrier: In view of the number of hon. members on this side of the house, charged with the responsibilities they have, it makes it extremely difficult to fulfil those responsibilities in the house and at the same time be represented on the committees.

An hon. Member: Whose fault was that?

Mr. Chevrier: I am afraid I had nothing to do with that decision.

Some hon. Members: Yes, you did.

Mr. Chevrier: If the second part of the report in which concurrence is sought read as the hon. member for Lambton West wanted it to read, namely that the committee would not sit unless it was absolutely necessary, perhaps that would put a different light on

the question; but that provision is not contained in the report. It is being moved without any conditions attached. Mr. Speaker, I am going to make a suggestion and it is this, that this matter be allowed to stand for today and that we discuss it tomorrow.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised that this report should have been brought in at this time in the exact terms in which it has been presented, in the light of the discussion we have already had in this house during this session and in the light of the very clear statement made by the Prime Minister. Now, a few days after he made the statement, we are faced with a situation completely contradictory to what he said. I refer to the statement he made on May 30 as recorded at page 702 of *Hansard*, when we were discussing the setting up of certain committees.

Mr. Murphy: That concerned the estimates committee.

Mr. Argue: He said:

One thing which was made extremely clear by the Leader of the Opposition was that to the maximum extent there should be no interference with the business of the house by the sittings of the committee and I could not be more in agreement with that, because we do not want the sittings of the committee to supplant in any way the operations of the House of Commons, whether in formal debate or otherwise.

While it is true that the reference of the Prime Minister was to one particular committee, I believe that in the sense in which it was made it is a statement the Prime Minister would have applied to the estimates of any department referred to any committee, no matter what the committee might be. The Prime Minister went on to say:

Someone mentioned that we should not endeavour to rush parliament. In other words, every opportunity should be given for the fullest consideration of the matters that come before the house, and that is true.

A little later on he said:

We wish to make this House of Commons as efficient and as effective as it is possible to do.

The membership of the committees of this house totals more than 700, and in view of the large number of committees I suggest that if there is any disposition on the part of the government to have any number of committees meet while the house is in session it will be impossible for hon. members to carry out their functions as they should. It has been said by the house leader that the objections we are raising are a smokescreen and that he knows many instances when the representation of the Conservative party in this house was no larger than the present representation of the Liberal party.