

Striking Committee Report

and self-interest which has to be changed if we are ever going to accomplish a reform of Parliament or the institutions of Parliament.

● (1410)

We are here to get the message across to the people of Canada that we need and require effective changes. We need new procedures and processes if Parliament is to become effective and reflect the will of the people across Canada. But we see no real evidence that the Government is willing to make those changes.

In the few moments I have left I would like to outline to you, Mr. Speaker, the fact that in the course of this debate we hope to present to the House of Commons and the people of Canada a wide variety of thoughts and opinions on parliamentary reform. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), a veteran of many years in this House and committee work, will give some historical background to the need for changes. The Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid), who is a working Parliamentarian, attends regularly at committees and knows how they function and should function, will indicate what is wrong with the Government and its attitude towards parliamentary reform. The Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), who worked long and hard on the Parliamentary Reform Committee, may have to say how disappointed he is with the result of that work in terms of the attitude of the Government.

We hope in a general way to provide a broad base from which others may attack the Government for its attitude, in the perhaps forlorn hope that the Government will see the error of its ways, will bend a little bit and really take up the spirit of parliamentary reform. We hope it will try to give some meaning to this process in the House and in the committees of the House, where we can arrive at mutually satisfactory decisions by the process of discussion and common understanding. But we do not want that process destroyed in round one by an arrogant Government which refuses to bend to good sense and good judgment.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Member who spoke prior to lunch said that he felt both the size and the composition of the proposed committees were unfair. Now, I can understand his reservations about the composition, but I find it difficult to understand that the size is unfair. I would like to ask the Hon. Member, through you, Mr. Speaker, why did he and his party unanimously vote for the provision in the Standing Orders which says that the size of committees should be from ten to 15 if he now thinks the size is unfair? I do not understand how he can say that.

Mr. Mayer: How can you ask a stupid question like that?

Mr. Crosby: Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that my friend even raises the question. The Standing Orders call for standing committees of not less than ten or more than 15. It is not that provision we quarrel with, it is the unwillingness of the Striking Committee to choose a number between the minimum and

maximum. In the case of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, the Striking Committee was willing to allow 15 members. We make the same request for the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs. That ought to be 15. In fact, there is no reason why 15 cannot be the standard as much as ten would be the standard. But we could not go down the list of 20 standing committees and determine what size each committee would be.

In endorsing the action of the Striking Committee, Mr. Speaker, my friend opposite is saying that there should be as many members on the Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs Committee as there should be on the Northern Pipelines Committee. That speaks for itself; it makes no sense.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I still do not think the Hon. Member has explained why they voted unanimously for a provision which allows committees to be ten. In any event, I would like to ask him if he believes it is desirable that a chairman of a committee be neutral, and if he feels that a chairman can in fact be neutral when both sides are evenly balanced and he is continually obliged to break ties in favour of the Government? How does he feel about that? Does he believe a chairman can be neutral if he is in the position of having to do that all the time?

Mr. Crosby: I think that is a very interesting point, Mr. Speaker, the possibility of having a neutral person as chairman of a committee. I know that Your Honour adopts habits of neutrality in residing over the business of the House, but I challenge anyone in this House to stand up and say that they have ever noticed in the work of the standing committees of this House neutrality on the part of a chairman who was a Government representative. There are ways and means to establish neutrality of the chair in a committee of any kind, including the standing committees. But not one provision was added to the Standing Orders by the Parliamentary Reform Committee or anyone else which would assure that kind of neutrality or judicious treatment of Members involved in the activities of the standing committees. So to stand in this House and say "Oh, we want judicious and neutral chairmen of committees in this new reform" is ridiculous. There is no foundation for saying that. There are all kinds of actions which could have taken place to assure a judicious approach by committee chairmen and not one provision was added. So I say to the Member: Show me where in the Standing Orders there is any obligation of neutrality or judicious conduct on the part of a chairman of a standing committee, and I will agree with him.

Mr. Collenette: Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the comments of my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Smith), because surely the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) contradicts his own argument. A few moments ago he stated it was the intention of the Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform to seek perhaps more independence of committees and permit committee membership some investigation. I think we have achieved that somewhat. Yet he now proposes an amendment