

*Government Orders*

I want to talk about the way in which these reforms go against what I think was the spirit in the recommendations of the McGrath committee report. Now McGrath is not sacred. There are things that we recommended that did not work out all that well. I do not stand here saying that this snapshot of parliamentary reform that was taken in 1985 should stand for all time and be unquestioned and always used as the benchmark against which we should judge everything else.

But one of the things that the McGrath report did was try, by its own admission and by the instruction given it by the government at that time, was to invest more power in the role of the private member, not just as a private member, but as private members gathered together in committee. I think this reform steps back from that in a number of ways.

It steps back, for instance, with respect to the control that the government wants to exercise on standing committees by having the parliamentary secretary sit on the standing committees.

The parliamentary secretary to the House leader will say: "It is not for control, it is for information, contact and communication, et cetera." Well, if those things were to be achieved that is fine, but the fact of the matter is that the parliamentary secretaries used to act like referees and coaches for the government side. The government wants to argue now that they will also be a source of expertise. Well, heaven help the government, in a caucus of 150 or 160 people, if it is only the parliamentary secretaries who know what they are talking about when it comes to a particular subject area represented by a committee. Surely the government should be able to find other members who are conversant with what is going on in that particular area.

I think that putting five or six committees into various envelopes and giving them only two rooms to meet in will limit the powers of committees on their own to say they are going to meet, they are going to do this and they

are going to study this because there will come to be a brokering of time and of rooms which will enable the people in power to decide which committee is going to be working and which committee is not. That is an inevitable fact of life when you have that kind of allocation of resources with respect to committees.

Giving more power to the government to determine whether things will go to a standing committee or a legislative committee and limiting the rules of legislative committees to hearing only technical witnesses is a step back from the McGrath reform. If we cannot hear non-technical witnesses at second reading, when can we hear them. When can we hear the people who are concerned about a particular bill unless we have, built into the Standing Orders, a guaranteed provision for hearing those kinds of people some other time at some other stage of the process and yet that is not here.

So to simply say that because something is approved in principle it is now longer to be debate except in its technical dimensions, I think it is not just an abrogation of what the McGrath committee had in mind, it is an abrogation of the parliamentary tradition. Even before McGrath, although things had been passed in principle at second reading, when the standing committee had it people were there commenting on the principle and the technical details of the bill.

The member for Annapolis Valley—Hants will remember only too well travelling across the country with the standing committee. The second reading of the Crow bill had been passed, but people were still talking about whether it should have been passed at all. That is an appropriate role for the committee it seems to me, and that is being removed by this particular reform.

Finally, this reform gives more power to the Whips with respect to substituting on the committees. If I understand it correctly, people can still appoint alternates which they can designate as their substitutes, but they may also choose not to appoint alternates, in which case it would be the Whip of the various caucuses who