

House of Commons Act

restaurant, and a number of others. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond my knowledge at the present time, the chairmen have not called meetings of those committees. We have not had an opportunity in those committees to review the activities that properly are the responsibility of clearly defined committees within the responsibility of the Standing Orders of both Members of the House and Members of the Senate.

It has always been a source of amazement to me, and from time to time I have made inquiries, that the mechanisms in place to provide for the calling of these meetings were never really activated. With the new rule that emanated from the third report of the special committee, I hope that kind of situation will no longer continue. It strikes me that once Members give up their rights to sit, meet and discuss the business of how the House of Commons operates, they give them up to the bureaucracy, the Government or a party leadership. That is undesirable. We have suffered from the effects of these neglects. In my judgment, we have only ourselves to blame because we as a group have not brought pressure to bear on our respective caucus organizations and leaderships.

I agree with the thrust that the Hon. Member for Edmonton West has developed over the last ten years on this matter. He has been a leader in these matters. He has correctly pointed out on every occasion he has been able to find in the House how we have cheated ourselves of a perhaps much different kind of administration in the House of Commons. I am delighted that he has again had an opportunity to put forward his message. I am pleased to inform him that in point of fact the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure did take into account the representations he has been making over the last ten years. It did put some effort into a discussion of the problem. It has come down with a report which we believe is clear, concise and acceptable to Members on all sides and, hopefully to the Party leadership on all sides.

I hope that when the new Parliament is called into being one of the first items will be, not the calling of the old forum of the Commission of Internal Economy but, instead, a recognition by the new Prime Minister that as an interim step the commissioners of economy should be expanded by calling on Members of the House of Commons who are Privy Councillors, but not necessarily Members of the Cabinet, to serve on this committee, and that at an appropriate time a Bill will be brought forward to amend the Senate and House of Commons Act to allow Members who are not Privy Councillors to sit on this committee as well, the way the committee has recommended.

Hon. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to enter this debate on Motion No. 115 of the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). I too should begin by sharing the concern expressed by my colleague about the loss to this House and to Canada of the Hon. Member for Edmonton West who will not be returning after the next election. I too share the view that he has made a great contribution to this place and to the parliamentary life of Canada. I regret that we will not have the benefit of Hon. Member's wisdom and sage advice from time to time, as we have had in the past. I have served on a

number of committees with the Hon. Member. He has always been an excellent Member and has made a great contribution, whether it be on the finance committee, miscellaneous estimates or any of the others he has served on so ably. His contribution in this House has been excellent. He has been here for well over 20 years. It is a shame to see him lost to the people of Canada.

With regard to his motion, it is in some ways precluded or superseded by the actions that have taken place by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure to which my friend from Kenora-Rainy River referred. There is a report outstanding which deals with the question of the Commissioners of Internal Economy. It makes recommendations with which I believe there is a great deal of sympathy throughout the House. Restudying the issue, as suggested in the motion before us today, would be somewhat redundant in that that job already has been done by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedures.

Quite frankly, I share the view of my friend from Kenora-Rainy River and my friend from Edmonton West that there is a necessity to change the composition of the board of internal economy. As has been stated, there are obviously some problems with that in that the current situation effectively puts the Government in charge of the spending of taxpayers' money. The spending of taxpayers' money is certainly involved in the administration of the House of Commons. The Government includes Privy Councillors, the Cabinet, and is in many ways synonymous with the Cabinet. Since it is the President of the Privy Council who is responsible for carrying through the estimates of the House of Commons, along with the Speaker, it falls on the shoulders of the Government to carry out this responsibility. The situation has evolved where the board of internal economy includes only Members of the Privy Council who sit in the Treasury benches.

I suggest, as did my friend from Kenora-Rainy River, that there is certainly room and latitude for change in this area. I believe, and I am sure that Members who are here today, as well as those who cannot be with us, would certainly agree, that the whole question of parliamentary reform, including the parliamentary responsibility for its own spending and its own internal decision-making, is something with which we should be moving forward.

As my friend from Kenora-Rainy River mentioned, the ninth report of the special committee puts forward several recommendations. The fourth and fifth recommendations deal most explicitly with the matter before us today. The fourth recommendation is "that the House of Commons Act be amended to restructure the board of internal economy". The committee members in their report went on to say that they did not feel it is appropriate for only Cabinet Ministers to be responsible for the internal management of the House of Commons, that the House of Commons is a community of many interests and this should be reflected in the way the commissioners are appointed. That is certainly true.

If Parliament is to become more responsible and respected in the eyes of the Canadian public, it is necessary that it