

The Government responded to the McGrath committee's report on parliamentary reform by expanding the mandate of parliamentary committees under Standing Order 96(2). This gave the standing committees of Parliament a much larger mandate than they had had in the past. In fact, it gave committees the opportunity to write their own mandates, as it were. They are now unfettered and unhindered and they have complete freedom to investigate whichever areas they wish. I think it is fair to say that this has been a benchmark in expanding the ability of the House as a whole and members from all Parties to hold the Government accountable.

Standing Order 99(2) requires the Government to respond to a standing committee report when the committee asks for a response. I point out that this was not part of the recommendations of the McGrath committee. This was something that was added by the Government to bolster that particular aspect of it.

I apologize for heckling the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) at the point that I did. I wanted to mention that the Hon. Member quite rightly pointed out that there had been a previous point of order on this issue. In fact, I believe there have been three points of order raised about it. Since there have been points of order raised on the question of the word "comprehensive" before, I would like to point out in fairness that there have been some 17 responses by the Government to committee reports since September 1986. In only three cases the question of whether or not the response was comprehensive has come up for debate. I know that my colleague, the Hon. Member for Edmonton South (Mr. Edwards), referred to previous rulings. I would like to expand upon that reference.

I would point out the comments you made, Sir, on June 29. At that time, you said:

It is not for the Chair to determine what constitutes a comprehensive response as this would be tantamount to judging the acceptability of the response. Clearly the Chair could not examine every committee report and every government response in order to make this determination. The nature of the response must be left to the discretion of the Government and, if Hon. Members are dissatisfied, there are avenues available through which they can pursue the matter.

You then made reference to a similar point of order which was raised on April 18, 1986, and you indicated that Mr. Speaker Bosley said:

—"that the Chair would be in a very difficult position were it called upon to rule on the quality of government responses".

You went on to say, Mr. Speaker, the following:

Members are entitled to express dissatisfaction with government responses to committee reports—

I think it is fair to point out as well that a member of the Government and joined in the debate questioning the word "comprehensive", and I think that is an indication that we stand behind parliamentary reform. You went on to say, Mr. Speaker, the following:

—but such complaints can only be pursued through the political process.

Point of Order—Mrs. Finestone

I suggest that by allowing this debate to go on now, the matter has been aired through the political process. The Government is content that that should take place. All Members of the House have had an opportunity to participate in the debate. I submit that your ruling of June 29 was sound and that this point of order should be ruled upon using that as a basis for your decision.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) rises to speak and I think it would be appropriate to allow her to make a short reply.

Mrs. Finestone: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that it is very difficult for you to determine whether or not a report is comprehensive in the political sense of the word. Yet if we just look at the numerical sense, in this particular instance we can see a flagrant abuse of that word. There were 85 recommendations, and not one single word. The Minister used the House just now to elaborate on her thinking. Whether or not I agree with that thinking is not the point. The point is, if she had used that avenue to tell the committee why she felt she required further time and that she made an error in judgment in asking us to go the legislative investigative route rather than the policy and then legislative route, fine, there would have been no argument. Yet with a sort of "the back of her hand" she completely disregards the effort and time put in by volunteers and staff. That is extremely disrespectful of the points just made by the Deputy House Leader.

• (1550)

The Minister also said she could not direct that regulatory body, but she is prepared to go with a patchwork quilt on the same broadcasting matter, and tells us she is going to bring in some CBC legislation. One should have a degree of coherence in the presentation of an argument for one's point of view. I suggest Bill C-20 was the first Bill I got when I came to this House over three years ago; two Ministers had that Bill for consideration, prior to my ever getting here, two other ministers had it, so she certainly had an option.

As a matter of fact, the Hon. Member for Essex—Kent (Mr. Caldwell) specifically asked the Minister if she would split the Bill and bring in the power of direction under Bill C-20. I asked that of the Minister. She seemed to be interested but now in her report she indicates that the Government is confident that the Commission will take no action to foreclose fundamental options with respect to such important issues as the respective roles of specific industry sectors or the economic structure of the broadcasting environment. She goes on to say that the CRTC is well aware that the Government is engaged in a major review of broadcasting. If she has some concerns, bring in the power of direction. If she is worried about Canadian content, do something about it. Do not slough it off in this way and then pretend she cannot do anything.

The last point I would like to make is that when we are talking about a response the Minister said she wanted methods