

*Procedure Committee Report*

This cannot be done all at once. It is a gradual process. I believe it could be done, in the words of the committee report, in a way which will not conflict with the principles of parliamentary control and cabinet responsibility. I am sure it could be done that way and I am sure all the committees which have been considering this problem have had this in mind.

As far as committees are concerned, and the work of committees—and this is the main subject of this report—there is no doubt that we do not use the committees system to its best advantage. The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) in a helpful and thoughtful contribution to this debate this afternoon mentioned the growing weakness of the legislative element in our parliamentary institution as against the executive. This is a situation which has occupied the attention of all students of democratic parliamentary institutions in recent years, because with the executive you have not only the cabinet but you have behind the cabinet, a growing body of expert officialdom which is inevitably becoming more and more important as government becomes increasingly complex.

I remember some years ago attending a luncheon in London, England, of some senior officials of the British government, departmental heads and some cabinet ministers. One of the ministers said to me as we sat down: "Here is the government of the United Kingdom, with two or three ministers." There is this problem—the growth of the executive, the new despotism, as Lord Hewart called it, and how to prevent it destroying the efficiency of the legislature. Could we strengthen the legislature by deepening and broadening the committees structure? There are some recommendations in this report which, I believe, when implemented may well have this effect. I hope so.

But let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that we can build up under the parliamentary system a sort of congressional committee structure. This was mentioned this afternoon. I do not think this kind of comparison has much validity because the committees system in a parliamentary institution as I understand it is bound, by the nature of things, to be weaker than a committees system in a congressional structure. One reason is that party lines are very obscure, at times, in congressional committees in Washington—they are even non-existent on occasions. This in itself makes the system function differently; because in the House of Commons we have a discipline imposed

[Mr. Pearson.]

by the threat of dissolution, and this extends also to committee work, even though party divisions there may not be nearly as apparent as they would be in the house itself. I hope they are not. Nevertheless there is always the prospect in a parliamentary committee of party divisions in the house reflecting themselves to a greater degree than they would under a congressional system.

Other members of the house have probably had a good deal more experience of committee work than I have. But it seems to me there is a feeling of frustration arising from a belief that whatever is done in committee will be repeated all over again in the House of Commons. This is particularly true in the consideration of estimates. This is why I believe the proposal to deal with the estimates and examine them in committee is the most important part of this report.

I think the committee work could be made more effective and I congratulate the special committee on the recommendations it has made to that end. I am proud to belong to a government which set up a committee on procedure under Your Honour's chairmanship in October of 1963. We were criticized this afternoon for not having taken more steps as a government to ensure that more was done in the past two years. But after the committee had been set up it was surely not only the responsibility but the obligation of government to leave it to do its work. It should be the responsibility and the privilege of the committee to make the recommendations. And it has made recommendations. But if the committee, because of the necessity of getting a unanimous report or for some other reason is unable to make the progress which should be made in the reform of parliament, then I believe it is the responsibility of government to move in and put its own proposals to the House of Commons. I hope these things can be done in the committee and its subcommittees and I hope the various reports from that committee will discharge its responsibility. But if this is not possible, then the government will have to move in and make proposals of its own.

As far back as 1962 when we on this side were in opposition we made certain proposals, and other parties made proposals in this regard. These have not yet appeared from the committee on procedure, but it seems to me they go farther than anything we have received and I hope that if and when the committee gets back to work in the new session it will be able to come up with recommenda-