

*Procedure Committee Report*

the legislative branch, do take steps to strengthen our right and our opportunity to control the executive, then atrophy will set in so far as that particular part of our function is concerned.

As a matter of fact I think we are suffering from a form of parliamentary schizophrenia. At the moment I am not sure what our role is, whether it is merely to come here and say yes or no to government legislation and estimates and to belabour the government when we find them doing things they should not do. If that is the case all we need do is spend two or three months here to accomplish this function. But it is my belief that we have a wider role to play along the lines I have mentioned so far.

I think it is only through this means of a combination of members in committee armed with adequate authority, determined to make use of that authority, that knowledgeable members with the assistance of research and technical staff will equip themselves in the Commons to again find and maintain that proper balance between the two branches which is essential in the preservation and the true work of democracy. For this reason I suggest that the beginning of such a move will be established by the report which we are now considering.

**Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur):** Mr. Speaker, we in this party support this report and are prepared to vote for it, although on some of the points of detail contained in the recommendations there are a few differences of opinion among our members. I think that is quite understandable, particularly in view of the sheer number of detailed points made in the recommendations.

This is the second time during the eight years I have been in parliament there has been a great interest in a re-examination of the committee structure. Some hon. members may have forgotten that in the first year of the Diefenbaker administration, which had the large majority, there was not only considerable discussion of, but a considerable effort put into activating committees, many of which had not met for many years. So we have the experience of that administration in that parliament to draw on in terms of how effectively committees can operate.

The only political scientist who has taken an over-all look at the government of Canada and put his opinions into book form, R. MacGregor Dawson, has pointed out that standing committees of the House of Commons, in his words, are superficially impressive but in fact are not very important parts

of the legislative machinery. Despite the work that was done to increase the powers given to the standing committees during the Conservative administration from 1958 to 1962, it seems to me that Dawson's comments still apply. I say that not in criticism of the previous government; it is merely the way these committees happen to operate.

The difficulty in appraising the committee system of this house seems to me to centre around the fact that we have not worked out anything beyond the most general theorizing as to how active, powerful committees will affect the balance between the cabinet or, if you like the government or administration—here I am thinking in particular of the civil service and the departments of government—and the rest of the House of Commons.

This may not be the point at which to get into political theories, but I suggest that one of the consequences we will need to face if we adopt the majority of the recommendations in this report is that the committees will be so much stronger, or potentially so much stronger, that it will require some adjustments on the part of the house as a whole and on the part of the government.

To me one of the great disappointments in this parliament has been the attitude of the Prime Minister toward parliamentary reform. He came out with the announcement, which I can only look upon now as no more than a publicity gimmick, that he was for a new kind of politics. One phase of this new kind of politics, I gather, was strictly in relation to his own party caucus. We all remember a year ago in October, I think, when there was a special meeting of the Liberal caucus. In order to satisfy the backbenchers there was going to be this creation of committees which would advise on the development of legislation and would work closely with ministers in the development of policy. How parties organize their caucus is, of course, their business; but the stories which came out at that time were to the effect that this purpose in reorganizing the Liberal caucus was an effort to meet the requirements of the Liberal backbenchers and enable them to play a larger part in things, which was an indication of the problem involved.

I gathered from comments made at that time that not all members of the cabinet, I think understandably, were ready to accept or were very excited about the prospect of such a new organization within the government caucus, and wondered how it might affect their prerogatives in introducing and administering legislation. That dilemma of