

Striking Committee Report

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. It being one o'clock, I do now leave the Chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At 1 p.m. the House took recess.

[English]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When the House rose at one o'clock, the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) had the floor.

Mr. Crosby: Mr. Speaker, before the recess I had made it clear that we are not merely opposing the report of the Striking Committee relating to standing committees, but we are opposing the attitude of the Government towards parliamentary reform. That attitude is characterized by such arrogance and inflexibility that the whole spirit of parliamentary reform, which pervaded the activities of the parliamentary committee in dealing with these reforms, will not only be diminished but may be destroyed.

In specific terms, the Striking Committee has demanded that 18 of the 20 standing committees have a membership of not more than ten persons. It has only allowed the Official Opposition three memberships and the New Democratic Party one membership on those committees. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, as has already been pointed out, that does not reflect the representation of Hon. Members in the House of Commons and the Hon. Members who belong to the particular political Parties. The Government, through its representatives on the Striking Committee, has simply endorsed the will of the majority without respect for the rights of the minority, and it is in support of democracy that we stand to object to that kind of imposition of the will of the majority. The House of Commons, after all, is the seat of democracy in this country.

Let us consider for a moment the purpose of parliamentary reform. We know that committees in parliamentary democracies play an important role in the legislative process in the broad sense. In many countries parliamentary committees or congressional committees, as the case may be, have varying roles. In the United Kingdom, the parliamentary committees play a relatively minor role and deal primarily with legislation, with no inquiry powers. On the other hand, in the United States Congress, the congressional committees are, in many ways, the seat of power within Congress and deal with a wide variety of matters. It is common knowledge that legislation will not be passed by Congress unless it has the support of the relevant congressional committee.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that a report I read recently on State legislative committees indicated that 24 per cent of the authority with respect to significant decisions

rested with committees of the State legislatures, as opposed to 26 per cent of the authority in relation to significant decisions resting with the presiding officers. In some legislatures, therefore, Mr. Speaker, the committees, which are the emanations of the legislative body, play a very important role.

I believe part of the attitude and intent of the Parliamentary Reform Committee is to give that kind of strength, that kind of capacity and ability to the committees of the House of Commons. But the Government has already, as I have indicated, destroyed that spirit and prevented that transfer of power taking place, so that Hon. Members of this House of Commons will continue to be subjected to the will of the majority and will lose the ability to represent the people of Canada, and their interests, through the medium of parliamentary committees.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I want to underline the fact that the Government is taking an inflexible and arrogant attitude in not co-operating with all Hon. Members of the House of Commons to arrive at a mutually satisfactory arrangement with respect to membership in parliamentary committees, thereby uniting in the common goal of assisting the people of Canada, and allowing those persons who have special interests to come before Parliament to express those concerns.

We are trying in this parliamentary process, as I thought, to make Parliament more effective by allowing Hon. Members of Parliament to become more effective and, therefore, better able to represent their constituencies and the interests of Canadians. But, Mr. Speaker, if the Government does not change its attitude, then that purpose will not be achieved. Members of Parliament must seek a better rapport with the people of Canada.

This is evident from many things which have been written and said, but I want to refer specifically to the words of Arthur Lower, a distinguished Canadian historian who commented on parliamentary reform and specifically the reforms proposed by the Parliamentary Reform Committee. He was quoted in *Maclean's* magazine as saying:

I would say those changes are relatively unimportant because it is not mechanical changes that are necessary to improve Parliament. Unfortunately, what needs to be changed is a much bigger task: human beings. What we need in Ottawa are more able, more sensible, less selfish, self-interested, less partisan members. It is the calibre of members that needs improving.

This eminent Canadian has put his finger right on the problem. We can change the mechanics, the process and procedures, but what we really need to change is the attitude of Members in Parliament. I do not believe the Hon. Members of the Official Opposition need to change their attitude. What must be changed is the attitude of the Government towards the effectiveness of Parliament and its Members. And when Mr. Lower is talking about selfishness, I am sure he is talking about the Members of the Government of Canada and not the Members of the Opposition. It is that attitude of selfishness