

House of Commons Act

be eligible to sit on the new board. That would open the scope of membership to all Members of the House of Commons. It would not exclusively provide an opportunity only for those Members of the House of Commons who are Privy Counsellors, not in Cabinet per se. I think that is a significant change in itself.

The board in the future would be composed of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, two Ministers of the Crown—that is Cabinet Ministers,—the Leader of the Official Opposition or a Member designated by him and four others: two Members appointed by the Government caucus and two from the Opposition caucuses, including at least one from the Official Opposition. The proposal we made did not specify how the caucuses were to make their appointments because we thought that was best left to the caucuses themselves. This would ensure that the dominance in terms of numbers at least on the new board of internal economy would be broadly spread out through the system.

We would recognize the special position of the Leader of the Opposition who under the Standing Orders is in fact an officer of the House of Commons. He would be represented on that board in any way he saw fit. It would satisfy the necessity of Members of the back-benches of the Opposition caucus and of the right of the New Democratic Party or a third Party to be represented by caucus as well as the right of the back-benches of the governing Party to be represented by caucus. It would provide a broader range of opinion and it would provide an appropriate role for Members of Parliament to participate in the governing of our Chamber.

Mr. Deans: That is fair.

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): I hear the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans). We tried to provide when we were discussing this matter a method which would be unassailable, that no person, not even the most devout proponent of the existing system, could possibly find unfair. We tried to make it more palatable for the Government and we included two not one representatives from Cabinet on the board. I felt that was somewhat excessive, but I recognized the fear which the Government had that Members might act irresponsibly. It was certainly culpable because of the reluctance to allow anyone else on the committee before, but probably as an interim measure this was as good as we could get.

If we take a look at the proposals we have produced we find that they meet the requirements the Hon. Member for Edmonton West has put forward in terms of fairness, being logical and disturbing the Government probably less than it might be disturbed in its desire to control the affairs of the House of Commons.

I confess that as a former Parliamentary Secretary to the House Leader, that is to the President of the Privy Council—of course not the current one—I often felt that because of the responsibility of the President of the Privy Council for the Commissioners of Internal Economy, he tried to run the House of Commons as if it were a branch of his own Department. In fact, I often felt there were dangerous tendencies on the part of

Presidents of the Privy Council to regard the operations of the House of Commons as they regarded the operations of their own offices. I think it is an instinctive reaction because of the unique position in which the House of Commons Act puts the President of the Privy Council. Basically he carries responsibility for the Estimates and, by and large through the Council, he has the responsibility to veto spending propositions. In point of fact, the way in which financial reporting was established, he had power over the operations of the House of Commons as if it were in fact his own Department.

One proposal we made was an attempt to break that kind of absolute control with which the President of the Privy Council tended to feel he was blessed by the House of Commons Act, by trying to demonstrate that there were wider interests to be considered as well. I might say that the President of the Privy Council often shared that power and authority, particular aspects of it, with the Speaker and with Opposition Parties. It was never a total one-way thing, but the responsibility, as the Act was interpreted and implemented, certainly led the President of the Privy Council to feel that he was responsible for the conduct of business in the House of Commons.

I think that approach communicated itself to the Government. One tendency I have seen over the last five years or six years which I regard as quite undesirable has been the overtaking of the administration of the House of Commons by the Government. For example, there has been the change in the control over the grounds outside from the House of Commons to the Department of Public Works. That is one item which I find most unfortunate. I feel the House of Commons and the Senate should be much more co-operative in order to fight off the imperatives of various government Departments as they try to take over more and more of the precincts of Parliament. It is recognized by all that they can play a very useful consultative role, particularly as the precincts of Parliament have grown substantially over the last 10 years.

As a result we have another proposal in our report which requires the establishment of a joint committee on parliamentary services between the House of Commons and the Senate. We feel that would lead to a quick resolution of a number of duplications of services that have continued to plague us, and of the difficulties we have had from time to time in terms of the jurisdiction of the building.

As Hon. Members will recognize, there has been a tendency for the jurisdictions to clash. I think we are all aware of the last example, but I think I should mention it. It occurred when a decision was made on the House of Commons side to have a different form of security clearance than Members of the other House were prepared to accept. There was a clash between the representatives of those chambers.

• (1750)

Putting in place a mechanism such as the committee recommended would go a long way toward eliminating those kinds of problems and making life in this building that we share much more harmonious than it has been from time to time. We do have a number of joint committees. For example, there is the joint committee on the library, the joint committee on the