

*Statements by Ministers*

note with interest that the Government House Leader has indicated that that in fact will be the process.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure the Hon. Member who chaired the committee knows, the House Leaders have in fact met on a number of occasions and have gone through the recommendations. They have looked at methods of implementation, taking into account certain of the problems which arise which have to be resolved in advance of implementation. And I am confident that over the course of the next two or three weeks, certainly in advance of the opening of the next session of this Parliament, we will have these rules in place, as we have all of the other recommendations in place which the committee recommended to the House.

I do, however, want to suggest one matter which is of major concern to me, that is, the recommendation which dealt with the question of petitions. There was a recommendation which I cannot quote verbatim but which I can paraphrase. The recommendation was that it would require a minimum of 25 persons in order to constitute a legally acceptable petition. I suggest that that is a dangerous precedent. I do think that it is the right of every individual citizen to petition his or her Parliament, and that has been the basis upon which the system has grown. If there is but one citizen someplace who feels aggrieved by the actions of his Parliament or by the results of the actions of his Parliament, he has the inalienable right to bring forward a petition and seek redress. I would be reluctant to go from that which I consider to be a very good principle to a principle which requires that a person have the support of 25 other persons in order to petition. I do not see that that is absolutely essential.

It does not seem to be too terribly onerous in a country which has a population of 25 million to find 25 persons to agree on one matter. However, a matter which is being brought to the attention of Parliament could well be a matter which affects one person directly or it may be matter about which one person feels particularly strongly. So I think I would, perhaps, beg of the House that at some point we not accept that change, well intentioned though it may be, and that we leave it as a right of every citizen to petition his or her Parliament in his or her own name asking for redress. I feel that that would make sense.

Another matter I would like to raise is one with which I know we are going to deal. We have had conversation about it and although it does not appear in the response of the Government, I am confident it is going to be dealt with when we sit down to discuss methods of implementation. It is the whole question of the numbers and definitions of committees. The Government House Leader will recall when he, the House Leader for the Official Opposition and myself gathered together one week ago tonight in the Commonwealth room to welcome a significant number of representatives of the ethnic communities of Canada as they celebrated the establishment of the ethnocultural committee. That is the committee which looks at questions directly related to ethnicity and the development of Canada in the future. We all said the same thing, that

this was a much needed, long postponed initiative on the part of Government and on the part of Parliament.

It would seem passing strange that we should, one week later, indicate to that group that we do not think it is necessary, but I do not believe that that was the intent of the Government House Leader—in fact, I know it was not. It was only after consultation with him that I decided to raise this question. I believe that he and I both agree, as does the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray), the House Leader for the Official Opposition, that there will be the necessity to add committees, albeit a few, to the list of committees recommended by the Committee on Reform of the House of Commons for the very reason that there are certain things which we all deem to be necessary and certainly advisable, and we should bear in mind that those committees may well have to be included, along with the others.

So I say to those who are in the ethnic community in Canada today, and who travelled all the way to Ottawa to join with us in celebrating the establishing of the committee: Fear not, it is not going to be done away with. We have already agreed to it.

As far as the balance of the recommendations are concerned, I say as delicately as I can to the Speaker that regarding recommendation No. 73, which indicates the Speaker's power to select, as well as to combine amendments at the report stage—I recognize that this is a power the Speaker has, and I say this not necessarily for the incumbent but for the future reference of others who might not be as attuned to the system as it now exists—in that selection process, great care should be exercised, if it were in fact to be utilized, to ensure that in that selection process the subject matter of the amendments are also taken into account. Not only would they have to be admissible in a technical sense but the subject matter, those areas to which the amendments address themselves, must in fact be appropriately addressed in some other way in determining whether or not there could be the removal of one or more amendments offered at the report stage to be selected by the Speaker.

In addition to that, we must recognize the political nature of the House of Commons. It may well be that for crass political reasons—and I know that rarely do we ever do anything for those reasons—it is necessary to pay recognition to the fact of whether an amendment came from the Government side of the House or from the opposition side of the House and, even more important, I believe, whether it came from the two opposition Parties jointly. In all fairness, it may be necessary to recognize that both opposition Parties have submitted similar amendments in order that both can claim credit for having pushed the Government right to the wall—which is always what we are trying to do, in any event.

I realize you might find that hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, but I am prepared to admit it because there is not another soul in the world watching this. They are all watching the Blue Jays. I feel quite confident that I can say almost anything today. There is not a single person watching us on television, I am sure. Everyone is sitting watching the Blue Jays, and at the