

allow the chairman of the Committee the right to stand and move concurrence in that report.

Now, what about the sixth report? It is critical to the recommendations we have made. What have we done with the committee system? We have gone for the British system of select committees. Our standing committees are now select committees. Under the rules in which the Government has concurred on a provisional basis, these standing committees-cum-select committees now have the annual reports of departments and agencies referred to them so that there is an ongoing order of reference and an ongoing investigative role. As well, they are charged with the responsibility of examining the estimates of departments, the idea being that small committees would develop a degree of expertise in the area with which they are charged and a degree of collegiality which is just as important in my view as expertise. As a result they would be able to give a more meaningful examination of the estimates referred to them.

The next step which the Government has failed to address by dealing with the sixth report is the establishment of ad hoc legislative committees. A very important reform is contained in that recommendation concerning a panel of chairmen. This is something about which we have talked for a long time but have never acted upon. Why cannot the Government act on legislative committees? It would go a long way toward deflecting or reducing our concern as an Opposition Party that somehow we have been had by virtue of the Government holding standing committees down to ten members.

I hope the Government gets on with legislative committees. I believe they are very important. I hope the Government agrees with the Speaker appointing a panel of chairmen to be an impartial presider over committees, just as you are, Mr. Speaker, in the House. I hope it goes one step further and gives us adequate committee rooms with proper decorations and proper furniture so that there will be a proper sense of decorum. I believe we now have the opportunity to complete what the Government initiated in June in terms of parliamentary reform. I hope the Government is not going soft on reform. I hope the Government will see it through, but it must send a signal to the Committee that it will see it through. The signal it can send is by getting on with concurrence in the fourth report, fifth report and sixth report of the Committee.

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of his speech the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) referred to the fact that there were less and less statements by Ministers. That is a reality. Under the Standing Orders we know that a Minister may—he does not have to—make a statement. I understand in not too ancient times but many years ago that perhaps the Standing Order was used more often. I am sure the Hon. Member is honest and will understand that the situation has changed somewhat since we have been dealing with major issues, as I stated in my speech, which required a lot of time and provoked in some instances what I qualified as unjustified resort to tactics such as the bells, fallacious points of order and so on that wasted the time of the House. Thus we have had less time to deal with Government business. In fact

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that time has been reduced to three days a week with our experiment on parliamentary reform. Wednesdays are not to be used by the Government any more. I am not against Private Members' Business, but it could be dealt with otherwise. Also one day per week must be given to the Opposition, so there are only three days a week available to the Government.

I am sure the Hon. Member understands that is a problem we have to face. When a Minister makes a statement in the House, time is required for an exchange of questions and answers. That is normal. But if we do it on an Opposition day, we hear complaints. If we do it during Private Members' Business, we hear the complaints: "Don't interfere with Private Members' Business"; "Don't interfere with time available for the Opposition"; or "Do this only on Government time". We have no time; that is the real problem we must face.

I welcome suggestions. I am sure the Committee, of which the Hon. Member is a member, will look deeper into this problem. There is a problem with available time because days are short and they are not numerous. This is one of our concerns. If we had more time we would be tempted to make more statements in the House; it would be easier.

It is frustrating when we are trying to introduce legislation and we see an Opposition Party preventing leave to introduce a Bill and having the bells ring for five hours or six hours. This time could have been used efficiently for statements by Ministers. There are Members on both sides of the House who are interested in having Parliament work and would like solutions to the problems.

The Hon. Member attended with me a seminar in Westminster in approximately 1977. He knows very well that if we compare our Parliament with others, including our mother of Parliament in Westminster, London, we have the best Question Period in the world. Of all Parliaments of the world ours is the most lively. Most of the Ministers are here. We do not have pre-notice of questions. We do not have only a third of our Cabinet showing up once every week or so. To replace statements by Ministers in the meantime, at least Hon. Members have an opportunity, if statements are made outside the House, to ask questions of the Ministers who are here every day and are willing to answer without pre-notice. Also the Opposition have 25 Opposition days. All this explains the situation, but I agree with the Hon. Member that we should try to find a solution, not only at the expense of Government time.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the intervention of the Minister because it gives me an opportunity to make a suggestion. He does not have to await a recommendation from the Special Committee; he can act on this himself. The proceedings of this place are now televised. Why could the Minister or the Prime Minister not make a statement at six o'clock? That is prime time. It would not interfere with the business of the House. Statements could be made at six o'clock and it would go live across the country, at least in the eastern part of the country.