

Procedure Committee Report

with committee work. Likewise, it sits only three weeks out of four, again to provide several days for committee work and to provide an opportunity for members to return to their constituencies. I was told by a number of the members of the Australian house and senate that the effect of this policy has not been to take away from the efficiency of parliament but to add to it, because they find they are now able to accomplish more than they used to when the house sat five days a week, four weeks a month.

I do not intend to speak much longer but again, Mr. Speaker, I affirm to you that you have our support for the recommendations of this committee and also for the recommendations contained in the 16 other reports that have been submitted to us. On the basis of the recommendations we have already adopted on a trial basis it is clear the experience has been good. I urge the government to take a bold step forward and accept the recommendations on a trial basis, in an effort to achieve the needed reforms and give us an opportunity to see in a practical way just how much more effective and efficient the work of the House of Commons could be by adopting some basic parliamentary procedural reforms.

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity of participating in the discussion on the report of the committee which deals with one of the most important subjects that I think we can deal with in this parliament, namely a reform of our rules and our procedures to make parliament operate more effectively in facing the problems that come before it for solution.

I think that the importance of this particular subject, the reform of parliamentary procedure, increases week by week, month by month and year by year as the problems we face in parliament become more numerous and more complex, and as there is a certain scepticism in public opinion in all countries where there are parliamentary institutions, as to the ability of those institutions to deal with the new problems of a new age, and as there is a growing attraction in certain quarters for short cut, totalitarian solutions to public problems. So, I think the committee in dealing with these problems has not only been facing up to important questions but has faced up to them in a non-partisan and very efficient way, and I would like to congratulate the chairman, particularly the chairman of the subcommittee, the hon. member who moved the adoption of this report, and

all the other members of the committee on what they have accomplished.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I am quite aware, as of course are all hon. members, that a change of the rules, even if it is a change that makes our institutions more adept to face the problems that come to them, a change of the rules and the regulations and procedures alone will not make parliament and parliamentary discussion more effective, any more than a change of the rules in hockey would prevent rough hockey, or killing time, or icing the puck.

An hon. Member: Nor in baseball.

Mr. Pearson: I do not play any games these days. But, Mr. Speaker, effective rules brought up to date and effectively administered do make institutions work better, and that is what we are all trying to do in this house, and that is what we are particularly concerned with tonight when we look into the recommendations that are before us.

The committee and its subcommittees have discharged their responsibilities. They have not completed them but they have discharged them, and of course the government has its own responsibility in these matters. Our responsibility as a government is to put into operation, or ask the house to accept as changes in our orders and rules those recommendations which it is felt would improve our procedures.

The committee begins its report by stating its opinion that the potential value of the committees system in the House of Commons is not being exploited to the full particularly in relation to standing committees. I think we could all agree with that. My experience in parliamentary operations goes back now over a few years both as a participant on the floor and as a spectator in the official gallery, and I can recall that every government which came to office always began by making declarations that it intended to make parliament more effective and, in particular, that it intended to make the committees system work more effectively. Each government has attempted in its own way to do something about this but most of them have found it difficult. Some very useful changes have been made over the years, especially in the last five or six years, but they have not been fundamental in character and perhaps we are approaching the time when there should be some more fundamental attack on the weaknesses of the operation of our parliamentary institutions.