

Striking Committee Report

—standing committees of the House . . . shall consist of not less than 10 and not more than 15 Members:

The flexibility, of course, recognizes that elections sometimes result in varying changes. The composition of the House does vary from election to election. While committee memberships must reflect the composition of the House of Commons, I believe all Members will agree that the job of the Official Opposition cannot really be carried out if it has only one person on a ten-member committee.

I would like to point out that the Official Opposition in committees traditionally leads off the questioning of witnesses. It must be able, therefore, to present in an effective and efficient manner the views of the Official Opposition. It is not a position that I take lightly. I hold the view also that the official role of the Official Opposition cannot be fully carried out with a single Member.

People do have conflicting demands on their time. Committees do sit when this House is in session. Sometimes a Member who wants to speak on a particular legislative measure before the House is called upon also to sit in a committee and to do his work as a serious committee member and member of that team. More important, I am pre-occupied with ensuring a high degree of continuity in our committees. One person acting can hardly be expected to carry the burden of presenting the views of the Official Opposition.

• (1250)

I believe that there is a significant, meaningful and constructive role to be played in committees and I also believe that the minimum requirements of human resources demand that Members be accompanied by one of their own Party members and that two substitutes be made available. The Striking Committee has seen the wisdom of providing for these two members of the Official Opposition. I am hopeful that it will be effective and constructive.

Finally, I would like to remind Hon. Members that in this Thirty-third Parliament, the Government was elected by a population of which 50 per cent of the voters cast their ballot in support of this Government. The Government received 75 per cent of the seats with 50 per cent of the popular vote. In other words, as was alluded to by the Government House Leader (Mr. Hnatyshyn), the Opposition will have less than a third of the members of the standing committees while at the same time representing more than 50 per cent of the Canadian population. I take it that that argument alone would bear some weight with the House Leaders and that they would keep it in mind when allowing the committees to set their own rules. They must also be able to work effectively in representing all of Canada and work for those who voted for them, whether they happen by chance to have control of 75 per cent of the House or, in certain cases, less than that.

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. As you now know, Mr. Speaker, the committee worked magnificently together. Co-operation was the key word. The flexibility of the Government is clearly exemplified by the document that is before us if you are to believe the

Government House Leader (Mr. Hnatyshyn), and of course I do. I simply want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if the House continues in the traditions established by the Striking Committee, there will be no discord and there will be absolutely no disagreement. It will come to a satisfactory compromise on all matters. However, I suspect that that will not be the case.

I found it interesting to note that while the Government House Leader was describing the balance of the seats in the House of Commons as being 211 government Members to 70 opposition Members, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) said that 30 New Democrats are as good as 211 Tories any day. He is right.

An Hon. Member: Better than 40 Liberals anyhow.

Mr. Deans: It is better than 40 Liberals as well.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: You are a legend in your own mind.

Mr. Deans: At least I have a mind in which to be a legend, right?

I think the argument over the numbers of votes cast in the last election and the percentage of seats in the House of Commons probably has some validity. I think that at some point in time, we may well change the method of representation in the House of Commons to reflect more adequately the percentages of the votes obtained by each of the political Parties involved in the electoral process. This is not something that is foreign to us. In fact, we have suggested from time to time that such adjustments could and should be looked at. They should be analysed and debated, and perhaps that is the reason for the creation of yet another committee of the House of Commons which would put to work those other people who do not have jobs.

I believe that the report of the Striking Committee, of which I was a member, is a good report. It reflects the requirements both of the Opposition and of the Government. The role of the Opposition, whether Official or otherwise, is a difficult role, and I will remember that when the Liberals come third. I will make sure that they will be given a suitable number of members on the various committees. I do think, however, that the role of the Opposition in a Parliament in which the Government has such overwhelming support is an even more difficult role. The role of the Opposition at this point in time has been made more difficult by the unbalanced nature of the Parliament of Canada.

Earlier on, one government Member said something about the role the Opposition must play. I hope that government Members will always bear in mind the role that they played when they were in Opposition. They were not always as constructive as one might have hoped. They were led ably by the now Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen). At some point in time, Mr. Speaker, I might be moved to inquire exactly what it is he does for the money he receives.

An Hon. Member: When he is not here.