

members in their party as to what the process has been, continues to be and will be later today and tomorrow.

I would like to begin by making three points. First, as the hon. member has indicated in his remarks, we do in fact have a striking committee report before this House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, you know that the government could have, under the rules of this House, moved concurrence in that report, and had that report adopted. The implications of that would have meant a dramatic change to our committee's system and its process. We chose, as a government, not to use our majority to do that, but rather to let the House and the House leadership have discussions so that we could come to an agreement whereby all members of this House would feel that the committee process was a baby of their own creation rather than one forced upon them by the government. That is why we have not used our legitimate powers, our majority, to force the striking committee report through this House.

The second point I want to make is this. As you know, and all members of this House know, the House leadership and the members of this House are presently discussing a wide variety of rule changes. Included in those rule changes are a fairly extensive list of changes to the committee process. These changes have been shared with the House leader of the Official Opposition, with the House leader of the New Democratic Party and with other members who are involved in the negotiation process. It has not been a secret. It has been widely discussed. There have even been press articles on some of the details.

These negotiations have been going because we, on this side of the House, fundamentally believe that committees are a creature of the whole House. They are not creatures solely of the government and that is why we have worked so hard to make sure that that rule change process, as it relates to committees and other issues, has a fair hearing, a fair discussion and an opportunity for consensus building.

The third point I want to speak to is this, and it relates specifically to the point that my hon. friend raises in the House, relating to the committee on consumer and corporate affairs. I have had discussions with members of the opposition on this issue on probably three occasions.

Privilege

I will not go into detail about the discussions because I do not want to betray any confidences about what was discussed in those meetings.

However, I do want to indicate to the Chair, and I think it is very important that the Speaker realize that in fact these discussions have gone on, that we have been working together to try and come up with a process that would allow this committee to meet, would allow the committee to study the estimates and still would maintain the integrity both of the rule changes that we are looking at in terms of future opportunities and, second, to make sure that the work of that committee would be balanced and consistent with structures that exist in the present system for committees of this House.

That is happening at the moment. In fact, I can indicate to the Speaker that I had thought, from conversations I had this morning, that we, on all sides of the House, were very likely to come to an agreement which would have meant an Order in this House later this afternoon. I had those kinds of indications, and that is why I am very shocked that the hon. member has chosen this opportunity, in spite of all those discussions and all those negotiations, to try and score a partisan point on something we, as a government, have been going out of our way not to treat as a partisan issue. Because, as I said earlier, we do believe that committees are a vehicle of this whole House.

My friend offered to you two options. He asked the Speaker to intervene and to enforce or force a decision.

• (1120)

I offer a third option, an option in keeping with the traditions of the Chair and of this House, and that is to let the process that is going on at this moment continue.

An hon. member: It is not going on.

Mr. Cooper: The hon. member says that it is not going on. Why does he not check with his House leader? Why does he not check and find out what conversations have been going on even this morning? Those discussions are going on; I can say that publicly in this House. There is no need for the Speaker to impose on the House a particular action when in fact I think we are very close to a consensus among the House leadership which will result in a decision of the House, of the membership and will protect the integrity of the committees, which is certainly the most legitimate and consistent goal that we