

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

speech debate early. We suggested the reference of the Biafra issue to a standing committee and used one of our own opposition days to debate the report of that committee. We tried to have the postal bill referred to a standing committee. This procedure would have saved several days of time in the house. We tried to have one of the farm bills passed in all its stages at one sitting. We agreed to sit extra time to pass bills, and so on.

Third, this excessive power is being sought when we have already obviously gone a very considerable distance in our willingness to accept so many of the recommendations of the committee that impose limitations on members of opposition parties in this house. But none of this is enough for this government. Apparently they want absolute control of the house. Throughout these recommendations there is a continuing emphasis on the value of study by standing committees. There are, of course, many advantages in the use of standing committees. But we are now in a position where two-thirds of the estimates go to standing committees. There is plenty in the existing state of our standing committees to give all of us concern about how much more we should turn over to them. I am not making any comment now upon the merits of the discussion earlier in the afternoon. The third report of the procedure committee itself reflects some doubt about the manner in which committees are presided over.

If I may say so without flattering, Mr. Speaker, there is a vast difference between the conduct of our procedures under yourself or the Deputy Speaker of this chamber and being at the tender mercies of some 20 members of the government party who, with all the good will in the world, do not have necessarily the training or competence of yourself or your deputy.

This report would require all the estimates to be referred to committees. Furthermore, this report would have all legislation referred to standing committees, except the very few instances in which the hon. member indicated use might be made of the committee of the whole house on bills. This use of standing committees under these circumstances is proposed without any effort to give expert assistance to the committees.

The Prime Minister did a very constructive thing earlier in the session when he made additional help available to the opposition parties. This was a constructive measure, and one upon which I have no hesitation in complimenting him again. The committees, Mr.

Speaker, are in no condition today, I suggest, to receive the vast amount of work that this change proposes be turned over to them. All of this would occur at a time when we have many committees meeting at the same time. As I say, we must recognize the limitations and traditions of those committees, to put it as tactfully as I can.

We should ask what would have happened in a situation such as prevailed here in this house between 1958 and 1962 when the combined opposition numbered 60 or less? The opposition would never have been able to man these committees effectively. The close examination of government spending and legislative proposals would be a farce. The consideration of these matters would be far less effective than if it took place here in this chamber, either in the house or in committee of the whole.

Even now, Mr. Speaker, when this government has its comfortable majority, it does not seem able to man these committees properly. Having been defeated on a motion in the transport committee and having decided on a new chairman last Friday, they apparently could not muster enough members to elect him. I think perhaps the government should bear this in mind when they are considering the views and difficulties smaller parties might have in adequately manning committees which are considering important measures. I must say I also wish to congratulate the government whip because apparently nobody would ever be able to program him.

• (5:20 p.m.)

Why should the government and its supporters in the house insist on abolishing the committee of supply at this time and sending all departmental estimates and in addition virtually all bills to standing committees for consideration? We recognize that the standing committees are a good place for the consideration of the estimates of most departments of government, but I have mentioned the weaknesses of the committees and the unsatisfactory traditions surrounding chairmen. I have already referred to the overloading of committees, which in turn is having an effect on attendance in the house.

We in this party want the right to have some departmental estimates considered in the committee of the whole house, and this is a right that we want recognized. We are suggesting that roughly one-third of the departments be considered here and that we have some choice as to which departments they are to be. Surely this is a perfectly reasonable