

*Striking Committee Report*

the House that the Government would, in fact, buy such a revolutionary set of proposals and, furthermore, be prepared to implement those proposals without going through the usual negotiations to clear up the inevitable loose points. I think we have come to deal with one of those loose points.

One reason for deciding to look at the figures of 10 and 15 was simply that we looked at how many Members actually showed up to do committee work. If Members look into any committee records to see who was present, they will find that it was a corps of members who basically carried on the work in every committee. If you look even further and review the committee work, you will find that there is an enormous shift of members on and off of these committees. If a subject came before a committee that was of interest to members, they would negotiate with their colleagues and there would be a massive shift of people. When there occasionally had to be a vote in committee there would be a massive shift of people again in an attempt to get enough members out to have a vote.

After seeing what members actually do, we concluded that there was a relatively small corps of members who carried on the work of the committee. There was the group that I called the *prima donnas* who like to be on committees when something exciting or unusual is happening so they could bask in the glory of committee work. There were a number of Members from all sides who were used to being drawn in from all sides for a vote so it would look respectable.

It did not take too much effort to arrive at the figures of 10 and 15. We first decided to eliminate the hordes that went around to vote. We accomplished that by setting up a list of people who were qualified to be substitutes on the committee. Another reason for making that list was to guarantee Members their place on the committee. We made it impossible or very difficult for a member to lose his place on the committee because the Whip must come to the floor of the House to say that he is removing someone from a committee and replacing him with another.

We were trying to give members a proprietary right in those committees. We were trying to provide that right to those members who actually carried on the work of the committee. In effect, we were trying to enhance the role of the Private Member and trying to provide an independence of mind in the committee structure in an attempt to get away from the power of the Whips and the power of Party leaders.

That is the purpose of this reform. We knew this would be a painful process because of the practice that has grown up in the House of Commons. All of us are guilty of that practice. When we seek re-election, we produce a long list of committees on which we have sat perhaps for ten minutes, so that we can impress our constituents with the knowledge that we are hard at work in more committees than any one person can sensibly attend in a given year. What we have become concerned about in this debate, to a large extent, is the matter of status, pride and the fact that we must realize that we can no longer run this place as we have in the past if Private Members want to

have power and authority. To accomplish that, they will have to specialize in certain areas and make some sacrifices.

We decided to recommend 10-member and 15-member committees because we want to improve the lot of Private Members. In order to do that, Private Members will have to become more disciplined, more specialized and independent. These proposals ensure that Private Members have independence.

A point of order was raised after Question Period today. It concerned this very issue. The point of order concerned whether papers produced by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) have to be referred in any way to a standing committee so that it could examine them. I intervened in that point of order to say that under the new rules, as long as it comes under the umbrella of an Act of Parliament or annual report, the committee has a right to look into that subject matter. The annual report of the Department of External Affairs certainly refers to disarmament, peace, NORAD and NATO, all of which are covered in the document signed and tabled by the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In my judgment, there should have been no point of order raised. The standing committee should simply have gone off and announced that it would hold hearings. In the ordinary course of events the committee would have come to the House of Commons with a report which we would then debate. That is how I see the system working. In order to do this and ensure that Members can participate in a sensible way, we can no longer have the floating hordes floating around and looking for a place to light for momentary glory while pushing those Members who carry on the work of those committees out of the way. We want to have a system in which Members have tenure on the committee, and when there is a change in the committee, that change is within the control of the individual Member and not within the control of the Whip or Party leadership.

We will have to give up certain sloppy practices that have developed over a period of time in the House. It seems to me if Private Members are anxious to take power and responsibility, changes in attitudes will have to be made. There must be changes in the way in which they approach the business of committee and the business of Parliament in order to make it take place. We know that this change will be very painful, because we know that there is status involved, sitting on a large number of committees. We know that there are many Hon. Members who like to see their names on a variety of committees. However, we also know that there is a large number of Hon. Members who take their committee work seriously. We want to give those Hon. Members the maximum opportunity to show their stuff and bring authority and power back to the private Members and away from the Party leaderships, back to the floor of the House of Commons and committees, where it belongs.

● (1500)

When we were in Great Britain, the special committee studied the way in which the British committee system was