

Report of Special Committee

mously in the House on, I think, one day's debate, a provision was established for independent references by committees. In other words, committees could begin to act independently and take up references from matters arising out of the Estimates as they saw fit. They were not hampered in their investigations because the time for Estimates came to an end. But one of the things pointed out to us in that debate by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition House Leader, the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), was that there was no provision in that report for the calling of committees. That was recognized by the committee as something we overlooked in the third report. So one of the first things we undertook to do as a committee was to bring forward a proposal, contained in the fifth report, which would remedy that situation.

We considered a number of the matters which took place in the debate on November 29—Mr. Speaker, I am having very great difficulty. The Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) is talking from his seat as usual and I am having very great difficulty—

Mr. Evans: Quit playing politics.

Mr. Dick: Shut up, Evans.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):—with that buzz of heckling from the other side of the House. I ask the hon. gentleman to show me the courtesy I try to show him when he is addressing the House.

Mr. Evans: Get it on the record.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): In order that there could be some assurance to minorities on the committee, not the Government majority but minorities, there was a proposal that Standing Order 69 be amended by adding a new subsection, which would read:

Within ten sitting days following the adoption by the House of a report of the Striking Committee the Clerk of the House shall convene a meeting of each Standing Committee reported on for the purpose of electing a Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

In other words, there could be no delay in convening committees; it would have to be done within ten days by the chief administrative officer of the House. The second subsection goes on to read:

Upon the written request signed by any four Members of a Standing Committee the Chairman of the Committee shall convene a meeting of the Committee within ten sitting days following the receipt of such request by the Clerk of the Committee. The reasons for convening such a meeting shall be stated in the request.

Now, the committees have not used it very much yet, but they have the power to carry out an investigation. The purpose of that report was to ensure that the question as to whether or not a committee should be struck would be set aside and handled through the machinery of the House. More important, those who were interested in a particular issue would know that that issue could not lie buried. It could be brought forward publicly before that organized committee. The decision taken as to whether that issue would be investigated would be taken publicly, openly, notoriously and in the light of

day so that judgments could be made as to the effective operation of the system. It is a very simple but very important right because, as it stands now, if this is not adopted—and I hope it will be today—then Members of Parliament will have no complete right to exercise the new powers given to them in the third report under which we are operating at this time.

I do not intend to speak very long on this matter because it is very simple and straightforward. But I do want to say to the House that there was a first-class feeling in that committee. I think it is important that the House knows that in the course of those proceedings we had 73 meetings from June, 1982, to September, 1983. We heard valuable testimony from a host of individuals who are interested in and worried about the operation of the House of Commons. Many Members of Parliament came forward. The wishes of some Members do not appear in those committee reports, but many do. We are grateful as a committee that all of them came forward. We addressed a number of issues, and in all those hearings that committee, made up of people from all Parties, was able to conduct its business without a vote or division on any occasion. We operated by consensus, and I honestly and earnestly hope that the Government House Leader and Members of the Government will, if there are personal differences, set them aside for purposes of improving upon the temporary Standing Orders. There may well be differences. My friend makes statements from time to time which, when the history of this time is written, he will regret, because he will be proven to have been wrong. I now forgive him for that because it is absolutely essential that the work of the committee not slide by the board.

• (1220)

I also want to express my thanks to the Members of my own caucus. We have argued long and hard over these issues. Members of my caucus should agree unanimously, as they did through the mouth of our House Leader yesterday, to the acceptance of these reports, hopefully without debate. I think that it is a tribute to the reform work that has been advocated in this Party by the Hon. Robert L. Stanfield when he was Leader, by the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark) when he was Leader, and now under the Hon. Member for Central Nova (Mr. Mulroney), that this tradition of reform is being carried on.

I also want to express thanks to my friends in the New Democratic Party. I gather one of them will be speaking today with respect to the importance of these reports, this one and others, in the work of the committee. I want to thank them for unanimously agreeing yesterday to going forward without debate, so as not to cut into the Government's time, in order to have all seven of these remaining reports approved.

I think the House Leaders of both Parties have done a great service in terms of the process of reform. If there was ever an indication that there must be changes in this institution, it was evident in a poll that was brought forward some time ago. No matter what we may think of one another in the House, the process of reform is much too important to allow it to stumble over the feet of discord. I think that we now, at the end of this