

Striking Committee Report

become better known as the Parliamentary Reform Committee, was established on May 31, 1982. Its purpose was to make proposals to the House of Commons that would lead to reforms in the parliamentary system, in the procedures that we follow, and in the rules that apply to our processes and procedures.

That Committee met on numerous occasions, I think in a spirit of reform and of assisting Parliament to better conduct the affairs of the people. In result the Committee formulated a report which was tabled in the House of Commons in November of 1982 and later met with the unanimous consent of the House of Commons, so that the specific recommendations for changes that were proposed by that Parliamentary Reform Committee could be carried out and implemented.

The net result is the new Standing Orders which we have and which, with respect to committees, are represented by Standing Order 69. I think it may be worth while to review very briefly the specifics of those changes recommended by the Parliamentary Reform Committee and unanimously approved by the House of Commons that we have now implemented in Standing Order 69 and in other Standing Orders of the House.

The first and foremost provision and change was that standing committees would be limited to a regular membership of not less than 10 or more than 15, and I want to speak more specifically about that provision later on. It was also established that in standing committees there would be regular members and alternate members. The idea of that change, as I understand it, was to ensure that there would be continuity of membership. That is to say that if a regular member could not attend a meeting of a standing committee, a substitute who was already briefed and knowledgeable in the matters before the standing committee would stand in the place and the stead of that member. There is, of course, a provision for substitution on a 24-hour notice basis, so that membership will be assured either through the attendance of regular members or alternate members.

One of the important changes that were carried out in the new Standing Orders was the reference to standing committees of all reports, returns or papers tabled in the House of Commons by a Minister. I do not have to underline the importance of that provision because we have already had a debate in the House of Commons today on that very point and we have seen the real attitude of the Government towards parliamentary reform. Notwithstanding this specific change in the rules authorizing a reference to a standing committee of the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) refused to make such a reference and argued that he does not need to make such a reference.

So the case that I would have made in my presentation has almost been made by the debate in this House of Commons this very day. We have had an example of the exact mischief that was attempted to be prevented in this rule change—the covering up of matters of importance, not only to Members of the House of Commons but to the whole Canadian population

who are not going to have that window on Government apparently that we thought we were going to have through the references of reports, returns and papers to Standing Committees of the House of Commons.

It is not with a very clear heart and mind that we view these changes that are supposed to be implemented in the new Standing Orders, particularly with respect to the committees of the House of Commons. Our specific concerns have already been expressed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer), in his questions to the Hon. Member for London East, but I will repeat them here. It is, simply stated, that we do not think that the size of the standing committees and the allocation of membership on those standing committees is fair in the circumstances, and we certainly do not think it is in the spirit of parliamentary reform.

In case Members opposite do not understand what I mean, I will explain it once more. The report of the Striking Committee calls for standing committees of 10 members except in the case of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence. All other standing committees listed in Standing Order 69, and there are 18 of those standing committees, must, by virtue of the provision of the Striking Committee report, have a minimum of 10 members.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but the Striking Committee, by exercising its power to allocate positions on the standing committees to members, has chosen an allocation of six Members of the Liberal Party, three Members of the Progressive Conservative Party and one Member of the New Democratic Party. So there we have, in 18 of the standing committees, a membership of 10 with an allocation to the Parties in the House of six to the Liberals, three to the Progressive Conservatives and one to the New Democratic Party.

Simply stated, we do not think that is fair and we do not think that is in the spirit of the parliamentary reforms that were adopted and advocated by the Parliamentary Reform Committee, were agreed to by the House of Commons and are now being implemented by the Striking Committee report.

Because we do not think it is fair, Mr. Speaker, we want to introduce an amendment and I beg your leave to present that amendment to the motion to concur right now. I will read it, if I may do so. I move:

That the third report of the Striking Committee be not now concurred in but that it be recommitted to the Striking Committee with instruction that they have power to amend the same so as to recommend that the Standing Committees of the House of Commons, with the exception of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, consist of eleven (11) members each and that, of those eleven (11) members, six (6) members shall be representatives of the Liberal Party, four (4) members shall be representatives of the Progressive Conservative Party and one (1) member shall be a representative of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Speaker, I present that motion, seconded by the Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Shall we call it one o'clock?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.