

House of Commons Act

the courtesy of being here, but unfortunately I am now five minutes late for a very important steering committee meeting downstairs. I shall return immediately so that I will not miss their golden words.

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Edmonton West has a reputation for being very persistent. This particular motion is one that he has been trying to convince the Government to accept for about ten years. It is a motion that I support.

I have never understood the reluctance of the Government of Canada to allow Members of Parliament who are Privy Councillors but who were not Members of the Government to participate in the affairs of the House of Commons. We were able to obtain a halfway step in the formation of the Special Committee on Members' Services, and later its inclusion as a committee in its own right in the Standing Orders. But there is nothing in the law that ever prevented the Government from accepting the principle that other Members from other sides of the House and from the back-bench of the governing party be represented on the Commission of Internal Economy. It is no wonder that Members used to call the Commission of Internal Economy the commission of the infernal economy. It tended to make judgments and spending decisions which many Members had a great deal of difficulty understanding and accepting. It was, I think, one of the extensions of the Government that caused Members of Parliament a great deal of difficulty in understanding the motivations of Government in terms of its approach to the House of Commons. The fact that the Government kept extending its control over the precincts of the House of Commons, over the operation of the building that houses the House of Commons and the Senate, always struck me as extraordinarily retrogressive steps.

One of the reasons I support the proposition advanced by the Hon. Member for Edmonton West is that the House of Commons Act, Sections 15 and 16, which set out the powers and the duties of the Committee of Internal Economy. Section 16(1) reads:

16.(1) The Governor in Council shall appoint four members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada who are also members of the House of Commons, who, with the Speaker of the House of Commons, shall be commissioners for the purposes of this section and Sections 17 and 18.

You will note it simply says members of the Privy Council who are members of the House of Commons. It does not say members of the Privy Council who are Members of the Cabinet or Members of the Government. Yet, the Government has refused to accept the possibility of extending to Members on all sides of the House the opportunity to participate in what is in effect their Chamber.

This reluctance on the part of the Government has made life more difficult for Speakers. It has certainly made life more difficult in the House for the Government than was necessary. It was in my judgment a stupid blunder on the part of the Government not to extend representation on the Commission to Members on the opposite side and to Members on the back-benches of the Government side. It always increased the

suspicion that what was going on in the House of Commons was not in the interests of Members but, rather, only in the interests, of the Government itself.

If Hon. Members will look at the work that has been done by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure they will see that one of the items we took up was the question of how should the House of Commons govern itself. Should we continue with the existing example? Should we look, instead, at the way in which the Senate has governed itself? Should we look at what other Parliaments have done? In effect, members of the committee examined very closely the manner in which the British House of Commons governed itself. We also took a look at the way in which the Senate of Canada governed itself.

● (1740)

Hon. Members of the House of Commons may be amazed to discover that Members of Parliament in the Senate have a system of governing themselves which is absolutely mind-boggling to those of us who sit in the Lower House. There, power over Senate affairs is shared among all Parties. Members are appointed to the governing committee in the other place, not on the basis of being members of the Government but rather for independence of mind and questions of good judgment.

Here, one has to demonstrate perfection by being in the Cabinet to be a member of the Commissioners of Internal Economy. In Great Britain they go further. They provide for a strong committee on which the Government has representation and on which the back-benchers of the governing party have representation, as well as all other parties. There is a fair amount of consultation and consensus developed over time. Even though the Government makes the appointments, the appointments in fact are made on a highly consensual basis.

What we tried to do in the report of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure will be found in its ninth report to the House, which was tabled on June 22, 1983 and is now Sessional Paper 321-8/26F. The report is not long, it is succinct and to the point. It makes a great deal of sense. It will provide a blueprint for whomever becomes Prime Minister after the next election for reforming the House of Commons in a manner that will be acceptable to all, except those people who have sat on the Commission of Internal Economy as Commissioners and have jealously guarded those powers. To those Members who have never had that advantage, these reforms will seem like a breath of fresh air.

The committee made a number of recommendations which I think are eminently supportable. Basically the committee indicated that the House of Commons Act could be changed to amend the existing sections with which I dealt earlier in my speech, that a new board of internal economy be set up and that the change in terms of membership would be as follows: Members of Parliament, not just Members of Parliament who happen to be Privy Councillors, who are not in Cabinet would