

Procedure Committee Report

There is another recommendation in this report that we amalgamate the committees on external affairs and defence. I suggest this is long overdue because these are two phases of a similar problem. I believe that the effective functioning of a committee on external affairs and defence could aid in the dissemination of expertise amongst the members of this house in these important fields, enabling us to have effective discussions and criticisms.

The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) was one of those who suggested that the government did not adopt any of these recommendations of the committee on defence. I do not know that we could accept reports immediately and adopt them, but I am convinced that if we had a group in this house made up of members of all parties, attached to committees where they could make the greatest contribution, this group would become expert in this field and would be able to transfer their expertise into higher level discussions in this house in respect of practical legislation. One could go on with the whole series of suggestions in this report.

I was very pleased when I first became a member of the House of Commons to be informed that I was a member of the committee on external affairs, because I was very interested in this subject. However, that committee did not meet during my first session of parliament. It did not meet during my second session here, until after the house had been sitting for six months. This is a matter of vital importance to which we should apply all expertise available. The committees system suggested by this report would make it unnecessary for us to have so many royal commissions and inquiries before which outside experts are called. Under this suggested committees system we could call all these experts and receive their opinions and advice.

One committee is not mentioned in this report—perhaps it could be a special committee—which I think is of the utmost importance, and that is a committee which would review the whole subject of constitutional change. This is a difficult and technical subject, but one in respect of which there are experts, and one about which the members of this house should not be asked to accept proposals which have not been subjected to thorough scrutiny by representatives of all parties in the house. They should not be asked to deal with these subjects until

[Mr. Brewin.]

we have had the advantage of having parliament as a focus for intelligent discussion of these problems that are facing the people of Canada.

I said I would try to be brief, Mr. Speaker, and I will try to be brief merely by saying that I earnestly hope that the words we have uttered today in commendation of this report will result in effective action to implement the report. We will not be deterred by—I was about to use the word “conservatism” but that would be a bad word to use—undue traditionalism that is unwilling to accept something new and different. The report has been described by somebody as a radical report. It is not radical in the least. It is a report that suggests practical and worthwhile changes to make our work more effective. I most earnestly express the hope that not only will we adopt this report in the house, but that through the committee or through the leadership of the government—I was very happy to hear the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) express his interest in this matter—we will move to carry out the report and move on from there at an accelerated pace with regard to the whole subject of the reform of our procedures.

I say that, Mr. Speaker, because time will not wait. We live in an age when we have to move fast. Every member of the house believes in parliament, but we will not find other people believing in parliament unless we are prepared to adopt new approaches, to move quickly, vigorously and purposefully toward more effective operation. This committee has made certain practical suggestions in that regard. We may not approve of every detail, but let us not only say to the committee that we accept their report but also say to them: Let us get on in the quickest possible way to implement what is in the report.

Mr. Terry Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful that the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) was as brief as he said he would be, because I want to make a few remarks tonight, particularly in view of the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) took part in the debate. In considering the report of the committee in a general way I think it is most important that we keep a sense of perspective. As someone said, these individual reforms can be brought in one at a time and may be debated at that time, but what I should like to do is to discuss the general need for such recommendations, what the committee was asked to do and what effect