

Procedure Committee Report

I mention this because, after all, estimates are the expression of the policy of the government for the year ahead, and it has always been my feeling that the concentration in these particularly committees should be upon the respective minister or his parliamentary secretary. But what happened in the years when we did have the estimates before committees in a continuous way was that quite often the ministers would not be there, and so deputy ministers or branch heads would be left to face the responsibility of explaining and defending the policy of expenditures.

I can give an example. If we could get the estimates of the Department of Labour before the committee on industrial relations a lot of us would like to know what the minister's policy is with respect to the manpower consultative service after the criticism made of it by the economic council and the Canadian Labour Congress. But if the minister were not there I think it would be quite unfair, much as I might like it, to probe deputy minister Haythorne and assistant deputy minister Dymond about the whole matter. I just give that as an example for the need of some rather thorough rules of the game when we get these committees going, so that we can move along fairly.

One of the other points I want to touch on deals with the most controversial of all the committees we have had, and this has tended to concentrate on and around crown corporations, the C.N.R. and C.B.C. in particular. But there have been other crown corporations that also caused a great deal of trouble. I did not expect from this subcommittee any more detail than it has given in its report, but it seems to me one of the wisest things we could do, if we adopt this report and its recommendations, is have a more thorough discussion and elaboration on the part of the government on how it sees these particular corporations would be handled by the committees.

Your Honour and all other hon. members know that the C.B.C. in particular tends to have a pretty rough time with Canadian parliamentary committees, mainly because most of us are inclined to feel we are experts on programming. Here again I revert to the point I made earlier. The Prime Minister talks about the new politics. Well, there are questions of very important detail, such as how crown corporations should be handled, giving us the advice and experience of the government and the officials themselves, things which would be most valuable as a back-

ground or, if you want, as an interpretation of this particular report.

There is a recommendation that the size of standing committees should not be less than 15 or more than 30 members. This is an excellent recommendation in realistic terms, provided we have the committees meeting mainly when the house is not in session, because then there would be no excuse for a quorum not being present. Sixty members is never the practising number of members on a committee, and the only advantage in having 60 is that it gives a reservoir to draw upon in order to scratch up a quorum. As I say, the new recommendation is realistic but only if there is a definite time for the committees to meet when the house is not meeting.

One of the recommendations that interests me most is the suggestion that there should be an advisory chairmen's panel with relation to committees. This is such a good idea in concept that I would like to see our present chairmen, Mr. Speaker, and the other people who are set out in recommendation No. 20, meet during the period of this parliament to talk about some of their common experiences and the routine difficulties they have encountered.

Mr. Churchill: They are all from one party, all but one.

Mr. Fisher: One of the ministers says they are all from one party.

An hon. Member: An ex-minister.

Mr. Fisher: I am getting as bad as the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin) and his difficulties with the phrase "prime minister."

Mr. Speaker: Order please. I must interrupt the hon. member as his time has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I only have a few comments to make respecting the fifteenth report of the special committee on procedure and organization now before us.

I do not doubt, as all other members, that there are grounds for improvements and that the select and standing committees should be granted more authority than they have had up to now.

As was pointed out by the former speaker, the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher), it is all very well to create committees and more and more committees to examine bills, procedure or, as in the present case, the