

Standing Orders

further discussion is required on how it will happen and if it will happen immediately and on things which I think should be and will be discussed further. I look forward to discussing them with the Chairman of the committee, the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), tonight and on subsequent evenings.

In closing, let me say that it is not easy to accept change. It is always more comfortable to leave things the way they are. It is always easier for Members to operate with rules with which they are comfortable and about which they are knowledgeable, but change is necessary. These changes are the ones which our peers decided would make this place work better. As I said when I first spoke to this a long time ago, I put my faith in that committee. Although I recognize, as they have said, that not everything they have recommended is necessarily absolute and guaranteed to work the way they might have hoped, it will work better if we all agree to co-operate. I feel quite confident that whatever difficulties could arise need not arise if we are prepared to consult one with the other and to seek the compromise for which the committee has become famous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Berger (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by thanking the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Jardine) for allowing me to speak before him. I have an engagement in my constituency this evening, and this should allow me to drive there without killing myself on Highway 417, as I think it is called.

The Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) referred to the fact that the Government listened to those who spoke and made some changes by presenting their motions in the special debate on December 4. I would say that this is the first time we have an actual motion on which to speak and we have to make a formal decision about the rules. Until recently, it was the Government's response to the McGrath Report. I hope the Government shows the same open-mindedness about the comments which are being made today. We are talking about parliamentary reform and we are saying that the views of individual Members count. I certainly hope that the observations which have been made by my colleagues and we will be taken into consideration in the final discussions that will formulate the rules.

I also take note of the fact that many Members, including the Hon. Member for St. John's East, stated that a major change in attitude would be required for these rules to bring about the kind of reform for which everyone sincerely hopes. Yesterday I heard the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) say that when he first came to the House he understood that an assistant deputy minister had more power than an individual Member of Parliament. When I was listening to him, I could not help but think—maybe, maybe. I recognize that the change of attitude which has been mentioned so often today will be necessary. It is not only the rules, the Standing Orders of the House, which will change everything overnight. If we have the same attitude as that which prevailed, for example, in the sale of de Havilland, we will not get very far.

I note that the committee could not really address the issue of confidence, which is at the heart of having a saner House of Commons. We saw a very striking illustration of the partisan nature of our parliamentary system, which was very difficult to avoid in the Regional Economic Expansion Committee that evening when the Government Members lined up behind their caucus chairman, who came in with a four-page written speech, and they voted down a list of witnesses that had been agreed to unanimously by the steering committee. Another thing that annoys and infuriates me, and which is an illustration of what I want to say, is when in this House of Commons we have to stand up and—I would ask the Government Whip to give me the opportunity of concluding my remarks. Perhaps he will be more impressed by what I have to say in a few minutes.

● (1640)

I was going to say that what annoys and infuriates me is when, in Question Period, Opposition Members stand up and ask the Prime Minister, "Will you allow a committee of this House to study such and such a matter?" It seems to me, as a Member of Parliament, very demeaning to ask the Government to allow a committee to study any particular question. I certainly feel, and I think probably 99 per cent of the Members in this House would feel, that a parliamentary committee, certainly the new kinds of parliamentary committees we are talking about which we propose in this reform, should be able to undertake a study when they see fit to do so. We should not have to ask the permission of anybody to undertake that kind of study.

Let us be clear about things. Even with these new kinds of committees where we hope to create a team spirit and a consensus as to ways of approaching matters, if the majority of Members decide not to have a hearing about a particular subject and follow the wishes of their caucus in that respect, the committee will not be undertaking the hearing and we will be back here in the House again asking the Prime Minister and the members of the Cabinet for permission to hold a hearing. We will be back to square one.

It is principally to the matter of committees that I want to address my comments. Broadcasting of committees is a fundamental element of giving power to Members of Parliament and power to parliamentary committees, and, as the Hon. Member for St. John's East said earlier, taking the emphasis off Question Period. He recognizes it, I recognize it, and I think everybody else in the House recognizes the overwhelming influence of radio and, in particular, television. Therefore, I hope that a quick decision will be made by the powers that be in the House which will allow the televising of committee meetings. That will be, to me, one of the most fundamental reforms. With the watchful eye of television on you there will be a tremendous power which will require Members of Parliament to come to committee prepared, which will require them to be responsible in their questioning and responsible in their interventions.