

*Procedure Committee Report*

However, if the various committees are to do the work about which we are talking they must be given the time and opportunity to do it. It has already been brought out in the debate today that it is not sufficient to demand from certain members of the house that they should take the time to carry out this work from the time they would ordinarily devote to constituency work or their work in the house. Therefore I think it is an excellent suggestion that time be set aside for this purpose.

From my own study of the procedures of different parliaments with which I am familiar—I am speaking of the mother of parliaments and of the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand—I know that time is set aside during which members of the house can concentrate on their committee responsibilities. We heard it said this afternoon that committees do not respond to their responsibilities and that it is difficult to get a quorum. I believe that results from the fact that committee members are not given the opportunity of doing the job they are supposed to be doing, with the result that they are frustrated and feel it is a waste of time. I think that one proof of the success of the defence committee is that this did not happen. Members of the defence committee have demonstrated an interest and a very definite sense of responsibility.

Therefore I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that while these suggestions are new and completely different from anything we have had in the past, they are worthy of a trial. I would hope that the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) would realize that here is an opportunity to institute a reform which would reach to the very heart and core of the problems that exist with regard to making parliament a more effective instrument in doing the work which we recognize is the responsibility of parliament. Without going into the details of the report or taking undue time, I say that basically the report provides a way of dealing effectively with the estimates and of permitting us to fulfill our own responsibilities in watching over the expenditure of the taxpayers' dollar more effectively.

We notice that there is a condensation of committees into a smaller number. As the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herdige) has already said, perhaps there may be objections to this, but I believe the committee was wise in doing this because it permits a concentration of subject matter that could not otherwise be established. I do

[Mr. Thompson.]

not think there is any legitimate objection which can be raised to this. If there is I think we would find out for sure, once we have operated on this basis for a trial period.

We anticipate the prorogation of this session before too long. It will be but a matter of days until we are into another throne speech debate and, I hope, a budget debate. What a great thing it would be if, when the budget is introduced and the estimates brought down, those estimates could be turned over to the committees that are recommended in the report. We would then find out just how effective are its recommendations.

The report recommends that the size of committees be reduced. Having committees of 60 or 75 members dealing with some of the more important topics assigned to them is not much different from what we do in the house or in committee of the whole. Therefore I believe this recommendation is a worthy one.

If we take an objective attitude to the work done during the last 13 months, and then look objectively at the recommendations in this fifteenth report I believe we will all admit that here is an opportunity to try and improve our work and thus our image before the country.

There may be some who have had longer years of experience in the house than I and who feel these recommendations are too revolutionary. I sense there is a feeling on the part of some cabinet ministers that if these recommendations were put into effect it would usurp the authority of the cabinet. One of the greatest hindrances to the work of government and cabinet members is that they are tied down to the day to day functions in the house and have not enough time to take care of their administrative work. Likewise they do not have sufficient time to plan policy, and if there ever was a time in our country when we needed consultative government, to approach our problems from as many angles as possible, that time is now.

Therefore the government ought to welcome recommendations like these which will not restrict or take away from the cabinet the responsibilities its ministers have. These recommendations will give the legislative arm of the house more freedom to deal effectively with administration and to consider policy.

One of the things that impressed me most during the period I spent in Australia was that the Australian parliament takes time off from its normal work within the legislative assembly in order to undertake committee work. Its parliament normally sits only four days a week, and the fifth day is occupied