

Accounts Committee, Procedure and Organization, Management and Members' Services, and Privileges and Elections, opposition representation is set at a level of 30 per cent rather than their 24 per cent representation in the House.

By proposing the committee sizes and composition outlined in this report, the Government is agreeing to allow Members of the Official Opposition to occupy nearly 17 per cent of the positions on all House committees. Members of the New Democratic Party will occupy over 12 per cent of all positions. This proposal results in a significant under-representation of the Government on House committees, but it is a proposal which has been agreed to in the interest of ensuring the full participation of Members from all Parties on all committees.

There are other formulas that might have been used and which would have resulted in a more accurate reflection of Party standings. It would be untrue for me to suggest that those formulas had not been considered by the Government. Indeed, I continue to be concerned that the Opposition will not be able to ensure that they are fully represented on all committees at all times.

The proposal contained in the Striking Committee report sets committee sizes in such a way as to give 60 positions to the Official Opposition, to be filled by full members of committees, and an additional 60 positions to be filled by alternates. Thus, there are 120 positions to be filled by a caucus which consists of 40 Members. This problem is further exacerbated when you consider the fact that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), the Opposition House Leader, the Chief Opposition Whip, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and any opposition Member attending to duties outside of Ottawa will not be able to participate fully in committee work.

For the NDP, the Striking Committee report provides for a total of 88 positions, to be filled by a caucus consisting of 30 Members. Full participation on all committees may prove to be a daunting task to members of the Opposition. Nonetheless, the report reflects their desire to ensure that their level of membership on committees is adequate to permit them to participate fully. We respect their wishes, and that is why we made and support the proposal that is brought forward today.

In the coming weeks, Members will have the opportunity to monitor the work of committees. If modifications to the size and composition of committees are required, those changes can be made in January when the Standing Orders require the Striking Committee to meet again.

Until that time, however, it is my hope that Members from all Parties will take the opportunity to participate fully on the committees of the House and that they will do so in a cooperative and constructive manner.

I believe that on September 4 Canadians signalled that they want a real change in the institutions of this country. They want a real change in the style of government. I think that this report reflects our desire to carry out that mandate.

Striking Committee Report

By agreeing today, I believe that all three Parties are taking an important step in setting aside what has been termed by some observers as a bitterness which has prevailed in this House of Commons, one that has often marked our deliberations in this House in recent years. We are in fact moving toward real reform and a real spirit of reconciliation in this most important of our national institutions.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments at this stage concerning the Striking Committee report, which I played some part in forming, along with my colleagues from the other Parties. Of course, the ideal situation would be to keep parliamentary standing committees and special committees down to a small number. There is no doubt about that. In that way, Members could concentrate on their work which sometimes becomes very specialized. They could also develop what I like to call a good working rapport with their colleagues. This is very important in committee work.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, until 1969, the committees of the House consisted of 30 or 40 Members, which meant that they were far too large and did not operate efficiently. It got to the point where the parliamentary committee system was almost a myth and of very little interest to Members.

In an attempt to enhance the role of backbenchers in the House, a new system was introduced in 1969. The membership of the committees was reduced to twenty, except for the Committees on Agriculture and External Affairs, which, if I am not mistaken, had 30 Members.

[English]

The result of these changes was that there were not enough Members to make the system work. Because of this, platooning of committees developed, thereby weakening the efficiency of Members and the effectiveness of the system. More seriously, no working rapport was developed among members because of this platooning phenomenon. It soon became quite evident to the House that we would have to change our rules again.

[Translation]

In December 1983, the Standing Orders of the House containing these changes were adopted and extended for a trial period.

Hon. Members will recall that the provisional changes were extended for a period of 120 days after the adjournment of the 32nd Session of Parliament—the former Parliament—120 days starting September 4, counting only days on which the House is sitting, which means that our present Standing Orders will be governing the proceedings of the House from now until the end of June 1985.

[English]

The present rules were adopted to allow for flexibility. That is the reason for Standing Order 69(1)—and this was referred to by the House Leader—which states this: