

House of Commons Act

my in the Ontario Legislature appeared annually before the estimates committee, if I recall correctly, and answered for their decisions. They were questioned by their colleagues from both sides of the House and I can recall taking my turn as one being questioned. It happened to be the three House leaders who were primarily answerable at that point. That is not necessarily the only formula, I concede, but on that occasion the Government House leader would be answerable for a period of time and then the question would go to the Opposition House leader and subsequently to the third House leader. As representatives of the House of Commons they would share, as would the Government caucus representative, in being answerable for decisions taken.

I happen to believe that was a very valuable contribution to bring the provincial Legislature into a position of more respect than it had been previously. Members of the House knew they could make representations either through their own individual representative, although we never felt as if we were representing a particular caucus, or directly to the Board itself. The Board, almost without exception, arrived at its decision unanimously. I say that with some pride because that was putting aside what could by some be viewed as an opportunity for partisan differences. But we worked very hard at finding adequate and suitable compromises. Where we could not agree, we did not go ahead until we had tried to find a workable alternative formula.

I say this to you, Mr. Speaker, because I think it may be important and that Members should understand that what is being proposed by the Hon. Member is workable, practical, not revolutionary and does not dilute the power of the Government. It in fact transfers certain responsibilities to where they rightfully belong.

From my own point of view, I think, and I hope I speak for my colleagues, that we could have a better understanding of the day to day operations of the House and its various parts and we could avoid the situation which continues to arise as a result of the structure we presently have. At the moment we have an advisory committee, the Management and Members' Services Committee. They work extremely hard. I have sat on that Committee from time to time and they put in very long hours and devote a great deal of time to careful consideration of questions placed before them. But unfortunately they have no direct input, neither do they have any responsibility. What we have is a Committee, which surely should be charged with the ultimate authority, being asked simply to make recommendations, the future course of which they have no control over. They have no direct representation with the existing Commissioners of Internal Economy and certainly much can be and likely is lost in transmittal of their ideas. At least some members of the Members' Services Committee feel quite frustrated because there is no two-way communication. There is the communication from the Committee through the Speaker, presumably to the Commissioners of Internal Economy, but there is no communication in return indicating why or in what way their suggestions were not worthy of consideration and could not be dealt with.

I think the Hon. Member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) mentioned that the Auditor General's Report has recommended this kind of structure should be in place to protect the integrity of the House of Commons in the broadest possible sense. I think there is a need for the Government to acknowledge there is value in further consideration of this matter.

I do not anticipate this Bill will pass this afternoon, neither do I propose for one minute that this form is exactly the form. I think you could well appreciate that I might want to put in additional safeguards for a situation such as the one we are in or for future situations. But I think the subject matter is valuable. I think the Government would be prepared to allow it to go to committee for consideration; that would be of long-term value. It would show the Government's attitude is not sort of narrow. I do not think it is in fact. I know I have raised this question on previous occasions privately with people who have a responsibility for things such as this and I did not find their attitude at all negative towards its consideration. So I would like to urge that we accept this as a workable proposition. It is desirable and would have a long-term, beneficial effect both on the operations of the House of Commons and on a day to day basis; and it would also transfer the responsibility for decision-making where it rightfully belongs. It would charge those who are the beneficiaries of the decisions of the Board with the responsibility for making the decisions. It would also charge them with the responsibility for making the decisions on all other matters pertaining directly to the House of Commons as they affect expenditures or fiscal matters.

Mr. Evans: What about the ninth report of the Special Committee?

Mr. Deans: The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Evans) says quietly to me, what about the ninth report of the Special Committee. The problem we have, of course, is that we must deal with what is before us when it is before us. At the moment this Bill is what we are dealing with. I would like to suggest that if the Parliamentary Secretary is prepared to rise and say he has been authorized to give us an assurance that the ninth report of the Committee, together with the eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth and so on, are to be approved—

Mr. Huntington: And the tenth.

Mr. Deans: And the tenth, are to be approved, then the need for further study on this matter may not be evident. But I do not think he is going to do that so I would like to suggest that we support a reference if it were to be allowed. We will certainly support going in the direction that this particular Bill proposes. We would argue, quite strongly, that there is overwhelming evidence to show that what the Hon. Member is requesting is already in place in other parts of the country and works extremely well and to everyone's satisfaction.

● (1700)

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I will take about two minutes,