

living under the new revised procedures which need to be dealt with. It seems to me only logical that we would refine and perfect that under which we are now operating before we add additional major changes to the system which would not only compound the newness and uncertainty under which Hon. Members in the House are operating, but would also compound the problem of the existing rules. Some of the parts of the final report, for example, modify procedures with which we are now living. There are at least two recommendations in the final report of the committee which would change the provisional rules under which we are now living and under which we are supposed to be living until December 21.

I believe we must consider what has to happen if a House order were passed today with regard to the fifth report. Presumably tomorrow we would be operating under different rules. That would mean that the Standing Orders of the House would have to be changed, because Hon. Members would not know what rules they were operating under, and they certainly would not understand the changes to the rules themselves. There is a logical time for us to make these changes, Mr. Speaker, and that is when we go into a recess, for example, the Christmas recess, as we did last year. On December 22 we passed the House order which said that when we come back on January 17, the new rules will take effect. It is not appropriate, to my mind, to change the rules overnight in the middle of a session. Hon. Members would come back on Monday morning and be told, "Well, the rules are changed now. The rules are not the same as they used to be." I believe there has to be an orderly process to parliamentary reform. In addition, it has to be an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary process.

I believe the time is inappropriate and, quite frankly, I feel it is unfortunate that the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton moved concurrence in this report today, not only for the reasons which will be raised very clearly by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen) later, but also because I feel that if we are going to implement parliamentary reform, it must be done in a way which continues the consensual process under which the special committee operated. That consensual process would have to involve negotiation among the House leaders, discussion with the caucuses to ensure the Members were in agreement and understood, and agreement that the process could carry on in an evolutionary fashion, not the kind of revolutionary fashion which would be the case if we were to concur in this report today.

The process which has been started by the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton, I feel, is regrettable. We were making progress. There was a feeling that we could negotiate some kind of changes with regard to the reports. However, that attitude and that good will has been largely damaged by the action which has been taken in this House today by the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there Hon. Members rising to make comments or ask questions? The rules at this point provide for a ten minute period of questions and answers. If there are no Hon. Members seeking to be recognized, the

Report of Special Committee

Chair will recognize the Hon. Member for Burin-St. George's (Mr. Simmons).

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin-St. George's): The subject of this particular motion is the report of the special committee which grew out of a recognized need for some change. The House determined 16 months ago that 20 or so Members of this Chamber ought to devote their time to the question of what is wrong with the rules of the House and how they could be changed to better facilitate the purpose for which we have been sent here by the people of Canada. For 16 months those Hon. Members, representing all three Parties, of whom I was pleased to be one, worked long and hard, week in, week out, month in, month out. We asked ourselves the question, what changes are required to better facilitate the work of the House of Commons? I can tell you that there were many disagreements. Many proposals came across the table about which at first hearing I could not get very excited as a member of that committee. However, hearing the rationale of the proposer of a particular change, be it an Hon. Member from the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party or my own Party, I found myself, along with 18 or 19 other people, seeing the wisdom of some fairly far-reaching proposals for change. As I said, I was pretty dubious about these changes when I first heard them. If one becomes accustomed to a status quo, a set of rules which has served us reasonably well over the years—with some glaring exceptions—one wants to hear a very good reason why they ought to be changed. At the beginning, there was no very clear consensus among the Members on the committee as to what rules needed to be changed, although there was consensus on the length of speeches. That has already been addressed in the third report, under which rules we are operating in this Chamber today. Aside from two or three very obvious areas, such as the length of speeches and the old Standing Order 43 procedure immediately preceding Question Period, and apart from the two or three areas which were very glaring in terms of their need for change, there were Members on the committee, I can say without misrepresenting anyone on that committee, who wanted particular changes to which I was opposed. I wanted changes to which other Members were opposed. That is the nature of the exercise. That is the reason why we needed a committee in the first place.

Those Hon. Members from all parties who spearheaded the effort to strike a committee long before the committee was ever established, recognized that you cannot ask a committee of 282 Members to focus on this issue. They recognized, in their wisdom, the need to delegate this matter to a smaller group of people with a particular interest in the issue who could focus on it day in and day out. This they did. The result is the fifth report which is before us, and several other reports which await the decision of the House.

● (1430)

Why, Mr. Speaker, have these reports not been concurred in in weeks, in some cases in months, after they came to the floor of this House? That is the easy question. Of course, the easy answer, the flippant, partisan answer, the answer that would