

Striking Committee Report

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, it might be just me but I did not notice a question in the Hon. Member's remarks. But let me say that the suggestion being made by the Hon. Member is more difficult to implement than he believes. The only way to resolve this difficulty is to change the outer limits, to alter the Standing Order in order to allow for 17 members on the large committees, which number can easily be broken down into Government and Opposition representation in a fair and equitable way, and to allow for nine members on the small committees, which number can again be easily broken down to allow for fair and equitable representation among the Parties and across the floor of the House.

There is no way that I can see, and I have looked at it carefully, to accommodate in a reasonable and fair way what the Hon. Member is asking for. There are 101 Conservatives in the House, as I recall.

An Hon. Member: There are too many.

Mr. Deans: An Hon. Member says there are too many and that is a subjective view, but nevertheless, it is true. There are 101 Conservatives in the House. In order for the Conservatives to be entitled to four Members for one Member of the NDP, to get that kind of ratio there would have to be about 130 Conservative Members.

Mr. Siddon: One hundred and twenty eight.

Mr. Deans: About 130 Conservatives; I was very close. It is quite clear that the three-to-one ratio is much closer to the actual fact—

Mr. Siddon: It is to your advantage.

Mr. Deans:—than the four-to-one ratio. Given the numbers of committees you would have to go through in order to achieve a reasonable balance in the way the Hon. Member suggests, there are not enough committees. There are just not that many. I suggest that if your Party could have supported my proposal to send the matter back for further consideration in the House of Commons, we would not be in the dilemma that we are in today.

However, perhaps I could again in a rhetorical way, since the Member cannot answer me, ask him or some spokesman for his Party to comment on the suggestion that we might find a way out of this dilemma by having an impartial panel along the lines I have suggested.

Mr. Herbert: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) did not have an opportunity to look at the Westminster operation, as did his seatmate.

Mr. Deans: I have been there before.

• (1450)

Mr. Herbert: He knows that the chairmen are selected from a panel of chairmen. But the assumption is that those committees which are studying legislation always have a majority of members in support of the Government, and it is set up that way to ensure that the chairman will not be in a voting position

and can remain impartial as far as the operation of the committee is concerned.

Putting aside the numbers game which we are playing a little this afternoon, would the Hon. Member accept the premise that the structure of the committee should be such that the members, other than the chairman, should always include a majority of Government Members so that the Government would always be, at least theoretically, in a position to carry the vote?

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief because I recognize the time is almost up. I would be prepared to see the committee structured in such a way as to reflect the composition of the House of Commons. When there is a majority Government, as there is today, then the committee should reflect the majority that the Government has in the House of Commons without the chairman voting. If we are in a minority situation, the committee should reflect the composition of the House of Commons at that time. I am absolutely committed to making sure that committees adequately reflect the way the House of Commons is made up as a result of any election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are other Members seeking to ask questions? If not, the Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid).

Hon. John M. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure looking into this question, I think I recognize that perhaps the most difficult reform we proposed was the reduction in the size of the standing committees. We were under no illusion as to what we were doing. We felt that there was a consensus in the House of Commons to reduce the size of the standing committees. We tried to find a formula that would be applicable to the House of Commons forever, since every time there is an election there are different proportions of Members from different Parties. I have been in the House when there have been three Parties, five Parties and sometimes six Parties and when independent Members have sought to become voting members of a committee.

After looking at figures, we came to the conclusion that there was no way we could develop a formula that would satisfy everyone forever. After considerable debate, we came up with a range which we thought was reasonable and fair: that was 10 and 15. Obviously, we arrived at those figures by dividing the size of the existing committees in two. We arrived at 15 because there were two committees consisting of 30 members each and we arrived at 10 because 20 was the standard size of most committees. The mathematics become more difficult and even more delicate when we deal with smaller numbers. This puts increasing pressure upon the chairman.

I was personally surprised by the Government's attitude when it decided to buy the whole package without amendment. In fact, I suspect that it not only surprised me and Members on this side, I think it amazed Members on the other side of