

*Suggested Improvements to Committee System*

becomes an automatic feature. Here again immediately we get into an automatic motion for concurrence; we are thrust right back into the House of Commons and the whole question of government majority. Indeed, if the committee's report contains minority features or in fact goes further and contains recommendations against government policy, then what is the position of the government in face of a motion for concurrence which, even if it is not debated, has to be voted upon?

The sum and substance is that whatever questions are set, if we are to have a parliamentary system the government majority pervades that system. If we were to attempt to remove that feature of government majority from the parliamentary system we would have something different that has to be constituted by a new set of rules for the Parliament pertaining to the life of the government—an element of defeat. I am not suggesting this is all bad. I have held to the view for a long time that the country would be better off with a complete parliamentary system if elections were held at fixed periods.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Jerome:** That is just one feature that could be introduced which I think would go a long way toward achieving the objective without going entirely to the congressional system.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a word about the facilities of the committees because this is very important. I say it in this vein: when we examine the questions before us, which has the greater priority—to enact further changes in the committee system, or to ensure that we have taken from the existing committee system all the benefits that are there? I think at the present time we have not derived all the benefits that exist in the committee system. To a great extent this is because of lack of proper facilities, lack of proper staff, lack of funds that might be looked at as research assistance, and staff for the committee system as such.

I can see that we could go to well established physical committee facilities where offices and a secretariat would be maintained to support that committee regardless of its chairman, whichever party he belonged to, and the chairman could occupy an office containing the files of the committee, continuing its work, giving it some longevity and continuity. I would consider that priority to be higher than further substantive changes, because we have come to live with the changes we made last time around. I would consider it a higher priority to try to improve the facilities we have at the present time and make the existing committee system more functional than it is before introducing further substantive changes.

It would be impossible, in my opinion, for any government worthy of the name to exist and to maintain that it was not examining and continuing a study of the committee system. I advocate, and will continue to advocate, that any Parliament must examine not only its committee system but must examine it on a constant basis, not intermittently or by special order of reference or the rules of the House. The mechanics for doing this, when we agree that it should be done, then raise the question of power.

I submit the Committee on Procedure and organization should have the continuing power to review any ruling or

[Mr. Jerome.]

proceeding of this House, including the committee system, and it should have the right at any time to request that that committee review a specific rule or a group of rules pertaining to a particular practice or procedure of the House, and that the committee be required within a reasonable time to return to the House its recommendations and that machinery be developed to take action on them. As it is now, the Committee on Procedure and Organization cannot consider procedure or organization unless the House gives it a specific order of reference. That is not as it should be.

I wish to assure the hon. member at least of my personal interest, and I am sure I divulge no secrets when I say it is in the interest of the government as a whole to continue to examine the functioning of our committee system and all our practices and procedures. This government is doing that, and I am sure will continue to do it in an effort to make sure that we maximize the return from the committee system as it exists and endeavour to implement any sensible and intelligent recommendation for substantive change, however great it may be, if it would be an improvement which would make the role of the member more efficient in all his functions in this House.

**Mr. Thomas M. Bell (Saint John-Lancaster):** I will be brief, Mr. Speaker, in the hope that others who are active in committee work can speak on this matter. I think this is a good motion and it has my wholehearted support. It is the type of motion that could well be considered by committee in detail. The parliamentary secretary has outlined quite well the comparison between our system and the American system as far as committee work is concerned. Those of us who were in Washington last week noted the differences when we saw a joint committee in operation there.

As the parliamentary secretary said, we appreciate the everyday problems that we have if we follow their type of committee system and then have to superimpose on the results two entirely different systems of government. But we have nothing to be ashamed of, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker. I think we have made very great strides in the last six years, but this does not mean that we have not a long way to go.

There is one point that I want to mention which might come under section (b) of the motion, "adequate staff support for committees". I feel that in our facilities a tremendous duplication of research is growing. I am pleased that we have the research facilities available to different parties which are doing a good job and are increasingly becoming more efficient. We have a giant research staff in our library, which of course is non-political. Now everybody is in the process of acquiring a second secretary who may be used in the proper way for research in that sense.

I think we have overreacted to research. I am not saying it should be the end of research for everybody, but I suggest that we might take one of these bodies, probably the research facilities connected with the parliamentary library, and detail them in a particular way to the committee work. In this way we would use them to great advantage. We would take out any fears they might have of being partisan if they had direction from the committees. This would add something to the resolution before us.