

Procedure Committee Report

and retreat? Many pieces of legislation have been placed on the order paper, presented to this house, withdrawn and then sent to a committee. We now have a bill concerning the Railway Act and we are told that a committee is examining it. But we are also told it is going to be changed completely at the next session of parliament. How does this help to speed up the work of parliament? When the next session comes along that particular piece of legislation will still have to go to a committee to be examined, because it will be an entirely new bill.

I think the biggest trouble parliament has encountered this session has resulted from poor administration, poor presentation of the work which we as members of the house are asked to examine and scrutinize. It is all well and good to say that out of the 237 days this session has lasted some 30 days were spent on the flag debate. That still leaves well over 200 days in which we could have proceeded with legislation, but the trouble was that legislation was before us, then was not before us, and then came before us again in another week or two.

We all know that the people will be governed whether or not this house sits. We are all well aware of the fact that the country is run by the cabinet and the civil service. In this democratic country parliament is the place to debate and examine proposed legislation. We must also examine the spending estimates of the government. A great deal of time has been taken by previous speakers in commenting on the estimates committee of 1959 and 1960. Certainly that committee did a good job. The members did a lot of work. I think the committee was well worth while and that it could be set up again without bringing in these substantial changes that are being suggested.

While there was a considerable amount of work done in those days in the estimates committee, it was my experience that the estimates were also discussed again when they were brought back to the house. Under these proposed changes the very same thing could and more than likely would happen. We are told that under the proposed plan the house would then be limited to 20 days on estimates. What would happen if toward the end of the session further supplementary estimates were brought forward? Sometimes two or three sets of further supplementary estimates are introduced. What would happen if we had already used up the 20 days? Would we then have another 20 days for further supplementary estimates? These are some of

[Mr. Horner (Acadia).]

the problems I wonder about, and certainly the argument that these substantial changes should be made in order to facilitate the passage of estimates just does not hold water if you examine the record of the former estimates committee.

What is the meaning of the new rules that have been suggested? What do they say? Basically the whole committee structure will be changed. We will have an inner sanctum of committee chairmen. As a member representing a particular area of Canada I see this inner sanctum as another stumbling block, another door to open, another body upon which pressure must be brought to get something done along the lines or in the manner that I want to see it done. That is how I see this new system. I may be wrong but I understand that this group of people will decide what is to be sent to committees.

Mr. Churchill: All from one party, except one.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): As the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) says, all from one party except one. As a result who will control what the committees do? The government. Maybe this is the way it should be. I am not saying it is not, but what change is there from what is done now? None. Nothing is referred to a committee unless the government wants it referred, so there is no real change there. As I said, it means just another door to open, another body or group of people on which I, representing the people of my constituency and the people of Canada, must exert pressure in order to have it proceed along the line of reasoning or thoughts I may have.

What is the committee's structure going to be? First of all, the size of committee is to be limited. Am I in favour of this? Certainly not. The special committee to examine the C.N.R. report has been limited to 35 members. This is a committee to which it has been very difficult to be appointed. I do not know why you would want to limit the size of that committee. As I see it, the members of the house represent various parts of Canada and we must know a lot about many things. How can we do this without taking an active interest and being able to participate in the work of committees? The railways, for example, run all across Canada. At one time or another nearly every member of the house will have a problem with regard to railways and will desire to serve on the railways committee. I know this has been so in the past.