

Business of the House

ment agreed unanimously to a trial period of at least a year to implement just one of the Committee's reports, why today, the Hon. Member is suggesting that we implement immediately, without a trial period, not just one but seven reports that go to the very heart of our parliamentary system, since some of them concern the supply procedure.

If the Hon. Member could explain his motives, perhaps we would harbour fewer doubts as to his good faith and the sincerity of his desire to improve the institution. That was why the members of the Committee agreed not to propose adoption of the reports to which the Hon. Member is referring. So once again—and I checked with the Committee chairman who is in the House today and who declared publicly that I was right—the members of the Special Committee decided not to play politics with parliamentary reform and agreed not to propose adoption of the reports, because we must take into account the general context of parliamentary reform and because we want changes that have been tested before they become permanent.

In the circumstances, I would again refer the Hon. Member to the members of this committee. I would ask him not to play politics with reform, and I again wish to express my sincere desire for negotiating these changes in good faith, keeping in mind the general context of parliamentary reform.

● (1510)

[English]

Mr. Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, because my position as Chairman of the Committee was brought into question by the words that were spoken, I want to say that there definitely was an understanding by the members of that Committee that these reports would be arrived at by consensus, that there would be unanimous decisions on the understanding there would be no move to concur in the House.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, what we are dealing with now is quite important. With regard to the question of understandings, that this Committee would work for a year and a half within a vacuum, with nothing being done and nothing flowing from it, was not the case. I have to say that to the House. Many Members can attest to that. There were members on the Committee who worried very much as to whether or not the work of the Committee would be acceptable to the Parties and whether or not, under those circumstances, the work would lie on the Order Paper as part of history. That was a concern of members of the Committee. But to take that to the stage of saying there would never be parliamentary action, especially when the Committee did act by way of consensus, if in the event there was consensus in the House of Commons, is to carry this matter much too far.

I say to my hon. friend, for whom I have a great regard and who is Chairman of the Committee, that what is happening today, at least with respect to my Party, is that we are indicating unanimity in terms of those reports. I do not know what the position of the New Democratic Party is with respect to this matter, but it would be interesting to hear that. I am

not saying the NDP has held back in any way. I believe it is important that the questions be put so that we understand in the House whether, if it is found there is resistance to consensus, that resistance can be overcome. It was not done on the basis put to me and to the House by the Government House Leader.

Surely there is not a member of that Special Committee in the House of Commons who would not take the position that if the reports are accepted unanimously in the House of Commons, we ought not to proceed with them. Surely that is not the case at all. That Committee was not working for nothing. We did not invest 18 months of our lives in that work, we did not compromise and come to understandings, to have these reports lie on the Order Paper. We hoped they would not die.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I am going to put it strongly to you, Madam Speaker, that we worked damned hard and damned well to have this matter come to some fruition. An offer has been made. Whether or not it is accepted will lie in the hands of the Government, but an offer has been made. I assume my friends in the new Democratic Party who worked hard on this matter feel the same way. But there was never any understanding that the matters would not be proceeded with.

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker, I do not want to deal with the understanding. It is quite clear that we cannot achieve parliamentary reform unless we are prepared to adopt the recommendations of the Committee.

I want to suggest two things in answer to questions posed to me. First, as far as the rules that are apparently in place on a trial basis are concerned, we are prepared to implement those, either permanently or to negotiate in a short period of time any minor changes that might be necessary, in order to make those the Standing Orders and rules of the House of Commons.

Second, as far as the seven outstanding reports are concerned—and I use outstanding in both terms; they are outstanding and they are indeed outstanding—I want to suggest that, as far as this Party is concerned, we would be prepared to pass them forthwith, without debate. If we can do so today, all the better. We believe the reform of Parliament is essential and that Parliament, given that there is a much better mood here today than there was, say, a year ago, would work even better if we were to undertake to put into place the recommendations of the Committee. I was a member of that Committee for a period of time, on which my colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie), sits as Vice-Chairman along with the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker). We believe that the implementation of those reports in total would make for a more workable and more responsive and responsible Parliament.

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle (Mr. Lefebvre), who was such an outstanding impartial Chairman of that Committee—and I