

Procedure Committee Report

responsibility of government to the effect that they were going to bring about the necessary changes to make the house more effective and efficient. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the challenge is now squarely before them because research and study work has been done that was not done before, resulting in a pattern being laid out before them with regard to suggestions how the procedures of the house can be improved. I believe it is their direct responsibility to put some of these recommendations into effect and to do so soon.

I urge the government as strongly as I can that they owe it not only to the house but to themselves to implement as many of these reforms as is feasible and practical. There is no doubt about the obvious need for a general overhaul of the procedures of the house. I think most members of the house will agree with that. Whenever anyone speaks about this subject we find that, regardless of the party to which they belong, they agree that this is one of the most urgent needs. Are we to be paralysed simply because we are willing to talk and not to take action? For this reason I cannot emphasize too strongly on behalf of our party the importance of the recommendations before us. It is not good enough to put this report aside and lay it on the shelf. Earlier today the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher) mentioned several recommendations that have already come from committees which have operated effectively under the old system. One of these had to do with Bill No. C-7 concerning the setting up of an ombudsman or parliamentary commissioner and which I personally sponsored. In my opinion the government cannot justify merely letting the results of the valuable work of this committee be put aside and forgotten.

An alert and aggressive government should welcome the assistance of committees and the non-partisan approach that is taken in the work of these committees, an approach which it is almost impossible to bring about in the same manner within the house itself. I think one of the best examples is the defence committee. It is only a couple of years ago that we were floundering without a defence policy. A lot of people were shouting about what should be done and most of them did not know what they were talking about. At least we now have a group of 24 men who have dedicated themselves to studying our over-all defence problem. I think it is particularly interesting to look back and review how that committee operated in the beginning. In the

early stages of its existence there was a tendency among the members to divide according to party lines, but it was only a matter of a few weeks until party lines disappeared and the differences of opinion that were expressed during committee deliberations were true differences of opinion with regard to what members thought would be the best defence policy for the country. I believe the experience of the defence committee points up the fact that if we can give our committees more encouragement and a better opportunity to play an effective role we will certainly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the house.

Mr. Churchill: Will the hon. member permit a question? I suppose we are in no hurry tonight. Can the hon. member give one specific instance of the good work done by the defence committee that has influenced the government in any way whatsoever?

Mr. Thompson: I would say to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) that this is not the time to enter into a debate on any specific action that has been taken as a result of the work of the defence committee. As evidenced by our present attitude in the house toward problems of defence, it is sufficient to say in answer to his question that a great deal of work has been done by the members of the defence committee and that the government itself has benefited from its work. I think it is sufficient to say that at least we have a group of 24 men who, because of their attention to this problem, are able to talk with some degree of authority and responsibility on the problems of defence. I believe that the recommendations in this fifteenth report basically make the same potential available with regard to every subject on which we deliberate in the house.

We accept the recommendations with regard to dealing with estimates as being good. This is a new idea, but when you consider that during the present session we have spent some 80 days dealing with estimates in the house it would seem that there should be a more effective way of doing this work. I think that the suggestion that once estimates are introduced in the house they should be referred immediately to the various committees would save, in terms of days of work, perhaps half of that time or possibly three quarters as is suggested by the committee report.