

Supply

believe that has been the experience of all Hon. Members who have sat or are sitting on that Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedures which has examined the rules and procedures, and we have some reports which I hope that the Hon. Members of this House of Commons, and the Government, will consider very carefully. They are there on the record.

• (1550)

There have been some fundamental changes made in the operation of this House of Commons. Members of the Committees understand the powers given to smaller but I believe more effective standing committees, at least potentially so. It will come as some surprise to Members as they begin to realize the scope of the work open to private Members with respect to those reforms. Some of the members of the Committee travelled to the United Kingdom and watched committees in operation and talked about special kinds of committees. It became apparent that we had just taken the first step and that the second step was to ensure that somehow or other, while Members of the standing committees of this House would exercise their function examining the Estimates and beyond that to exercise their right to investigate, there was a necessity for the Government to be assured that its legislative program could proceed. There could be some conflict between the Members' work on Estimates in the standing committees and their investigative capacity and the initiative the House gave them by accepting the third report and the necessity of this House being able to deal with legislation in a sensible way.

I do not think any Member has spoken yet, Mr. Speaker, about the sixth report in which the Special Committee considered one of the fundamental tasks of Parliament, that is the examination and consideration of legislation. What we in the Committee presumed to suggest to the House in our sixth report were two fundamental changes which will allow private Members of Parliament to undertake the expanding workload the Committee members feel is going to be pressed upon Parliament as a result of the reforms. Dealing with legislation, the Special Committee proposed that we establish what are to be called ad hoc legislative committees which would work this way: upon second reading of a Bill and the reference to committee, there would be established by the striking committee a representative committee of Members from all sides, the size and composition of which would represent the Party strengths in the House which could vary from Parliament to Parliament. That committee would have all the powers to examine legislation that our standing committees now have for the period of time necessary, and then the committee would dissolve itself.

Mr. McGrath: Changeability.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): My friend, the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has reminded me that that would allow consideration of legislation to go on while standing committees were dealing with Estimates and matters flowing therefrom. More than that, it would allow Members with interest and expertise to be taken from the standing

committees of the House to be placed on the legislative committees. I believe that would get away from the conflict which can sometimes exist when the standing committees are dealing with Estimates and dealing with legislation at the same time. It would allow the best expertise of the House of Commons to be free, Bill after Bill after Bill, to deal with the principles set forth in particular Bills. They would then dissolve, the next piece of legislation would come forward, another committee struck, and it can be dealt with in that way.

This was the unanimous opinion of the Committee. The report of the Committee, under the very able chairmanship of the Hon. Member for Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle (Mr. Lefebvre) is there to be read, and we hope it will be adopted.

The other aspect of that report which was missed completely in the press reports at the time is the creation of a system of so-called neutral chairmen. A panel of chairmen would be chosen by the Speaker in the House who would become from time to time the chairmen of these legislative committees. The Committee thought that the composition of that panel of chairmen would be more or less proportionally equal to the physical division of the House of Commons. There would be representation from Members of the Opposition, who have the same interests in legislation but maybe from a different point of view, as well as from the Government side on a more or less equal basis. The Speaker would have the responsibility of assigning from that panel, presumably after some consultation if that was the particular style, a chairman of the legislative committee to deal with Bill No. so and so. That person would act in that capacity and that committee would have all the powers of a committee of the House of Commons.

Our hope is not only to establish a sense of impartiality in dealing with legislation so far as the chairmanship of these committees is concerned, but to develop within the House of Commons men and women who could be seen by Members of the House of Commons over a period of time to be training themselves for the office which you hold, Mr. Speaker, the office that Madam Speaker holds and the office that the Hon. Member for Lachine (Mr. Blaker) holds. That ties in with the hope of the Committee that those who aspire to the job of Speakership do so for the job itself and go into that role with that objective in mind, namely that of becoming the first commoner in this House of Commons. We believe that not only would legislation be better considered by Members who are interested in the legislation, because a striking committee would decide what Members would be on the particular committee, but that those committees would be chaired in a neutral way so that this Government's legislative work could be facilitated. At the same time we would be strengthening the institution of the Speakership.

I ask all my colleagues in the House of Commons to consider that sixth report, particularly the last part dealing with the neutral chairmen, which has never been considered. I would ask the press to consider it as well as it has not been considered by them.

I never cease to be amazed, Mr. Speaker, at the capacity of this partisan House, from time to time, to do things and act in