

*Report of Special Committee***AFTER RECESS**

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, when the House rose for lunch I was speaking about the nature of parliamentary reform in our system and the situation in which the House finds itself regarding some of the suggestions put forward about how we should proceed with the outstanding reports tabled by the special committee, and the suggestion that we not debate these items but, by unanimous consent, adopt all the reports.

We are dealing with one report today. I am concerned that Members of the House have not given full attention to the matters that have been brought before it in those reports. It is quite clear that there have been preliminary discussions in each caucus with regard to parliamentary reform and what we should do when the current temporary rules expire on December 21. That has been the basic context of the discussion. In addition, there has been preliminary discussion on the proposals brought forward in the outstanding reports.

After talking to Members on both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that there has not been thorough discussion on the contents of each report and the implications of each of them. The fifth report that we are debating today is probably the most innocuous. It deals with issues that all of us could probably agree with most readily.

There are other reports outstanding. I will not get into the argument about whether concurrence was agreed to have been moved or not moved. Certainly Members on this side of the House who were involved in the committee were under the distinct impression that a consensual report would be tabled in the House, that a notice of motion would not be put, and that concurrence in those reports would not be asked for. As a result, they went along with some recommendations in the reports that, had they been voted in the committee or had there been a decision that concurrence would be moved once the report had been tabled, they would not have agreed to.

Of all the reports, the most contentious would be the so-called Huntington-Lachance report. It was an excellent report which dealt with a fundamental change in the nature of the way Parliament does business. It might not be an improvement but the recommendations went to the very heart of the way Parliament operates. I would defy any Member of the House to say that the full ramifications of those proposals are understood by Members of the House. They are not. The whole question of financial accountability in Parliament is well understood by a few Members. The Hon. Member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) has that understanding and has spoken eloquently in the House in the past about fiscal responsibility, financial management, and the accountability of Government and the bureaucracy to Parliament. I suggest that the recommendations that were largely a part of the Huntington-Lachance report—where they understand the nature of those recommendations and where they understand clearly what it is they are trying to achieve—are not understood by the vast

majority of Members. That is not to say that Members of Parliament are not interested; it is simply to say that this is a very complex area.

Mr. Malone: Shame!

Mr. Evans: I suggest that regardless of whether it is five, six or seven Members of the House who clearly have a grasp of the question of fiscal responsibility and accountability and say that this is what the House should do, it is so fundamental that it is something that all Members of the House should clearly understand en masse. It is not something that should be adopted holus-bolus by unanimous consent at the drop of a hat. It is too important. If we are to make such a change, we would be in a difficult position to make further changes in that area. For a long time we would be saddled with something that not many Members understand fully.

Parliament, by its very nature, is an evolutionary institution. That is why we go through three readings of Bills and report stage, why we send them to the Senate for three readings, why we have public hearings—we want to make sure that we get it right.

The kind of procedure we are engaged in today and would be engaged in under some of the proposals for adopting these reports holus-bolus, is not an evolutionary procedure, it is a revolutionary procedure. Some may say that Parliament may be revolutionized. I would not agree. I think my colleagues would agree that I have been very supportive of the notion of reform, the need for change, the need to make us more accountable, to make us seem more relevant to our constituents and the country. This cannot be overlooked, but it cannot be satisfied by a revolutionary change that institutes new policies and procedures in the House of Commons that are not fully understood by Members who will have to live under them. That is why I say, Mr. Speaker, that we should be taking the parliamentary reform process in a regular step by step way.

● (1420)

The Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) asked me about the third report. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the third report is in place. We have had experience with that for 12 months. But there are parts of the third report, parts of the procedures and rules under which we are now living, that Hon. Members in the House today, if they had an opportunity, would say need to be changed. For example, Mr. Speaker, we have the whole day on Wednesday devoted to Private Members' Business. As a result, it breaks the week. Hon. Members have said this. Those Private Members' days, being the sole business of Wednesday, break up the week, but it has led, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker—and you know it as well as I do—to the problem of attendance in the House at times, and that should be changed. Recommendations have been put forward from many circles as to how we should change it. Perhaps we should have Private Members' Business on Monday, or perhaps on Monday evening. Perhaps we should do it in some other way. Certainly there are issues with which we are now