

Striking Committee Report

impartial Chairman. I even thought the Standing Committee on Management and Members' Services had an impartial Chairman, as well as the Special Committee on the Disabled. If I had enough time I could come up with a number of committees where the committee chairman was impartial in view. I am sure the Hon. Member for Halifax West between the time he spoke and now has reconsidered what he said and recognizes that there are Members in the House of Commons whose dedication is beyond reproach and who act in an impartial way. I think to call them into question on the floor of the House is unfortunate. Anyway, that says it.

● (1440)

We would like to see the matter resolved if possible as quickly as it can be resolved in order that the committees can get on with the work they should be doing. We think that if there is to be any delay at all a few hours would make no difference if the Government were prepared to accept my suggestion for a different system of determining who shall chair the various committees with some kind of proportional representation on a panel of chairmen to accommodate that desire. With that in mind, if the Government were now to rise and say it is a wonderful idea, I would be prepared to attribute it to the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any Hon. Members seeking to ask questions of the Hon. Member who has just spoken?

Mr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, is it not true that when we had the vote in the Striking Committee, the Hon. Member for Hamilton-Mountain (Mr. Deans) voted with the Liberals and the two Opposition Members voted against?

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that the argument I made there is exactly the same argument I made here. I pointed out that to give the Conservatives an additional member would not make it a better balance. The balance that was there, unfair though it would appear in numbers, was no less acceptable or no more acceptable to me than the balance the Tories were proposing.

I want to make it clear also, and I say this to the Hon. Member in a rhetorical way, that I am sure he remembers my saying that the unfairness of the system that exists could be accommodated by a motion in the House of Commons changing the numbers from ten to nine and from 15 to 17, and then we could get the proper balance. I even said that I would be prepared to guarantee swift passage of it as far as this Party were concerned. There is no doubt in my mind that I covered all of the angles.

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Hamilton-Mountain (Mr. Deans). I do not think the Hon. Member would disagree that the division of representation in this House is 53 per cent Liberal seats, 36 per cent Conservative seats and 11 per cent NDP seats, whereas the proposal before this House gives Government Members 50 per cent more representation than Opposition Members. In other words, the Government would have 60 per cent of the membership of committees and the Opposition would have 40 per cent.

This means representation on committees is strongly biased in the Government's favour.

Is it not possible that committee size be adjusted so that on certain committees where more members might be needed, a higher than average balance is given to certain Parties and on other committees perhaps a lesser than average balance? In considering this we would give particular attention to the 15-member committee where the NDP will get 13.3 per cent of the representation and the Progressive Conservative Party would get only 33 per cent. In other words, we are giving up representation to the New Democratic Party on the 15-member committees, in a proportional sense.

Would the Hon. Member not support the notion that with a degree of flexibility the Striking Committee could have suggested something along the lines of the provision in the Standing Orders which applies to the joint committees?

On page 71 of the Standing Orders, the second paragraph reads:

Provided that a sufficient number of Members of the said joint committees shall be appointed so as to keep the same proportion in such committees as between the memberships of both Houses.

Would the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain not consider that rule might have been applied and the committee size adjusted somewhere between 10 and 15 so that in some cases perhaps the NDP would pick up the advantage and in other cases the Progressive Conservative Party would; but in no case would the Government be given 50 per cent more representation on committees than Members of the Opposition, which is totally unfair to backbench Members of the Opposition who get far too few opportunities as it is to raise important issues before this House.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Hon. Member is simply not aware that I offered to consider any proposal that would give fair and equitable representation in terms of both the Government and the Opposition and between the two Opposition Parties. If the Hon. Member has a specific proposal that I have not yet seen, then he need only put it before us. I can assure him that consideration will be given to it forthwith.

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, I will make my intervention short. The spirit of the amendment which this Party has put forward this afternoon would allow a referral back to the Striking Committee. I do not think the mover of this amendment would be hard and fast as to whether all of the 18 committees that are presently constituted of ten members would be held to 11 members as proposed. Perhaps some might have 13 members and a few more might have 15 members. Some of the committees have a much larger work load than ten members could handle. That speaks for the importance of a careful reconsideration by the Striking Committee, perhaps over the weekend. Nonetheless, such a reconsideration is essential if Members in the New Democratic Party agree with us that the Government has loaded the deck so that the Government has 50 per cent more Members on committees than Opposition Members, and that is totally unfair.