

Government Orders

forward by that committee are ones that I personally support and am urging the government to consider.

I am sure that in the new Standing Committee on Procedure and House Management the members opposite who have mentioned these with favour will raise them as proposals the committee could put forward to the House. I hope they will find some support among members of the committee on all sides. If we can come up with a recommendation to make such changes it would be delightful. I note the proposal for doing so is contained in the motion the government has put forward which indicates a willingness on the part of the government to consider this.

● (1645)

I may say the government has shown restraint in not wishing to touch on things like question period which are principally the domain of the opposition. Members of the opposition can come forward with constructive suggestions that will improve question period and the other opportunities they have as members to participate in the affairs of the House by questioning the government ministers.

I look forward to the opportunity. I look forward to the debate. I want to say how much I appreciate the very constructive suggestions being put forward today by members on all sides as we grapple with this problem.

The lack of confidence in members of the House stemmed in large part because the last government was so inattentive to the wishes and desires expressed by Canadians. It ignored Canadians. It failed to live up to the promises it made.

In proposing this motion we are trying to fulfil the promises we made in the red book. We are interested in allowing Canadians to participate in the committee process in a very meaningful and very direct way. In my view these changes which may sound small to somebody listening to this debate outside represent a revolutionary change in the way legislation is dealt with in the House.

I look forward to having these in place and having the co-operation of hon. members on all sides as we move forward to try bills in this new process.

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for answering my questions from this morning.

He also inquired as to how I felt we could restructure the committee system. In keeping with the rules of the House I would like to reword my answer into a question so it will be allowed.

Would the government consider going to the extent of initiating and setting up a public accounts committee with all-party

membership to look at the spending of two or three government departments for a year? In the process of one Parliament, which would be five years, we would be looking at 15 or perhaps 20 government departments after the fact. This would be a way to hold us accountable. Could I have an answer, please.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 104 there is already a Standing Committee on Public Accounts created by the House which is chaired by a member of the opposition. It has been a tradition in this place that a member of the Official Opposition is elected chair of that committee. I do not believe the committee has yet met, but when it does I have no doubt it will elect a member of the Official Opposition to be its chair.

The public accounts committee includes, and I quote from Standing Order 108(3)(e):

Public Accounts shall include, among other matters, review of and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada which shall be severally deemed permanently referred to the Committee immediately they are laid upon the table;

Therefore the Auditor General's report, which was tabled the other day, is deemed referred to the public accounts committee. It is free to study as many government departments in a year as it wishes to do. It is free to study, because those are all reported in the public accounts of Canada, which are referred to the committee and the Auditor General's report thereon is also referred to the committee.

The committee is free to undertake the study of any government department it wishes at any time. It is under the chairmanship of a member of the opposition so there is pretty free rein granted to that committee.

The hon. member may have missed it as its reports are not widely covered by the media and so we do not hear about it, but it worked extremely well during the last Parliament.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments of the hon. member with regard to the proposed changes to the standing orders.

I have a couple of comments and then perhaps a question. First, the door is open but we have not passed through it yet. I might say we have identified the right buttons but we have not pushed them yet. We are hoping that in the 35th Parliament we will not only identify the needed reform in this very institution but will also act upon those needs and implement them. I was glad to hear the hon. member say that the procedure and House affairs committee which he chairs would be willing to look at other issues with regard to parliamentary reform as well as the ones that are identified in the document we are debating today.

● (1650)

A particular interest of mine is reform of the other place by non-constitutional means. Perhaps once we have dealt with some of the issues on this paper we can get to those as well.