

Striking Committee Report

Mr. Deans: Take him, I don't want him! No, actually he would be an excellent chairman. He would be a person that everyone in the House of Commons would be delighted to support as chairman of a committee.

Mr. Smith: He wants to go to the Senate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deans: He chairs the caucus of the New Democratic Party. Hon. Members should consider this for a moment. Under the chairmanship of my colleague, have they ever heard of discord or disharmony in the NDP caucus?

Some Hon. Members: Never!

Mr. Deans: Never, because we had a firm but fair hand at the helm which allowed us to have little disagreements, but Heaven forbid they should go too far.

Having made the argument, I hope it does not fall on deaf ears. If we in the House of Commons believe that the committees are ours and that they should represent what we the Members of the House of Commons, want—

Mr. Forrestall: When you live long enough by the Niagara, you do not hear it.

Mr. Deans: I am sure the relevancy of that comment will sink in later. I promise that I will read it and try to apply it. I suggest to Hon. Members that since the committees are our committees, since the committees will be given additional powers, and since those powers will presumably give members of the committees a sense that they are in fact participating for the first time in the ongoing deliberations of the House of Commons and the country, perhaps we could afford a brief reference back and a hurriedly-called meeting of the Striking Committee. It will meet on Sunday, if need be; then we could consider the suggestion I have just made. It would satisfy everyone. It would cause no particular hardship. Although the Speaker is not empowered to make comment, I am sure he must find some slight favour with the thought, knowing how he enjoys the Chair being an impartial position and he exercises impartiality all the time.

I cannot support the amendment because it is no less unfair than the situation before us now.

Mr. Reid (St. Catharines): The Hon. Member is a member of the Striking Committee. What will he do about it?

Mr. Deans: I have already made suggestions as to what I will do about it. We will not support the amendment. If the Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid), who is offering advice gratuitously, would be interested in offering an amendment along the lines of the one I have suggested, I could guarantee him the support of this Party in trying to achieve that end. I think there are a number of Members who think that would not be such a bad idea. Of course, it is a small but further step in the process of developing the committee system.

I say quite bluntly that I understand the unfairness of the division. Even now I understand the unfairness of it, but to

make it equally unfair on the other side is not to make it fair. Thus, I have to choose between one unfairness and another. It seems to me that the impartiality of the chairman argument is one with which I find favour, although I am not satisfied entirely that we can achieve it in the way that the Striking Committee recommended. By the way, I am a member of the Striking Committee, as I have already said.

Let me say briefly that I hope at some point we will, in addition to doing what the Striking Committee did, take a look at the need for different kinds of committees. I feel confident the Committee on Procedure will look at it and look at, in today's quite changing society, the need for a committee to deal with matters related directly to women. I think it should be a separate committee since there is in fact a Minister who deals with women and the status of women. It might be very helpful and useful to have a committee to which all matters directly related to women are referred.

Given the controversy which has raged over a long period of time with regard to the environment, the impact of modern society on the environment and on the future of matters directly related to the environment, I suggest that we could give consideration to establishing a committee which deals directly with all these matters.

In addition to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, there should be a committee which is particularly taken up with the question of human rights. It is a serious question, not only as it affects Canadians directly, but also as it affects people from other parts of the world. Our interest in human rights extends beyond our own borders.

Mr. Forrestall: Talk about relevancy, Mr. Speaker!

Mr. Deans: On the matter of relevancy, we are speaking about the setting up of these committees and alternatives which I think are reasonable and probably would find favour with the public, if not with the Hon. Member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall). He was the same Member who offered me advice on the waterfall. I am not sure what that was about either.

I make these suggestions to be considered by the Government. Perhaps we are too restrictive in the determination of which committee should be established. Maybe we are a mite too traditional in seeing committees within certain restrictions and guidelines. Perhaps we should have a broader view of a much-changed society and establish committees to meet today's needs, rather than simply try to fit today's needs into the existing committee structure, because it does not always work. I think we could achieve it.

I am sure there will be Members who will want to ask questions and that I will likely have the answers, but I would like to make one parting comment to the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby). He asked whether we could name for him any committee in which the chairman was impartial. I thought the Standing Committee on Public Accounts had an