

Standing Committees

Order. There is no reason not to accept the motion under our procedures. So I must rule the motion in order under our procedure.

I have here the amendment moved by the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Roy) which is as follows:

Mr. Roy (Beauce), seconded by Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse), moved:

That the motion be amended by adding the name of Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse) as member of the striking committee under Standing Order 65.

● (1640)

[English]

The question, therefore, is on the amendment. The House has heard the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said amendment?

Some hon. Members: No.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Cape Breton Highlands-Canso): Mr. Speaker, the amendment which has been made to the main motion may appear to be very routine and very simple on the surface, but it must be remembered that this is not a routine motion as indicated by the comments of the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Roy) and his arguments in support of including a member of the Social Credit group as part of the striking committee.

The motion by the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark) says something very clearly about the political composition of the House of Commons, and particularly about the rights which each element of that composition may enjoy. I do not believe it was an accident or an oversight that the Prime Minister did not include in his motion a member of the Social Credit group.

Here, of course, I want to say that the member proposed to be added in the person of the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) is a friend of all of us and has participated very effectively in the debates of the House. But we are not at the present time dealing with the status of the hon. member for Bellechasse; we are dealing with what status the members of the Social Credit group, now numbering five, will enjoy in the Thirty-first Parliament of Canada.

It is obvious that if there had been included in the motion a member of the Social Credit group, that would carry with it the implication that in the House of Commons, if it did approve that motion, that group would enjoy a status, particularly the leader of that group, equivalent in standing to that of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau) and the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

We do not, of course, accept the proposition that a spokesman of the Social Credit group should enjoy the same privileges and rights traditionally accorded the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the New Democratic Party. It is not a question of denying members of the Social Credit party their rights as members of Parliament. Each of us would fight very energetically to maintain the rights which each member of the House of Commons enjoys as a member, namely, to participate in debates, to ask questions and so on. All members

[Mr. Speaker.]

will enjoy those rights. We have reservations as to whether, with the acceptance of this motion, a spokesman, for example, for the Social Credit group would have the same opportunity following ministerial statements on motions as would the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

It is a fact that the matter came before the House in February, 1966, on a point of order raised by the then hon. member for Cumberland who questioned the appropriateness of members of the Ralliement Cr ditiste and the Social Credit party being permitted by the Speaker to comment on ministerial statements. The Speaker at that time made a ruling which has been in existence since then.

I should, however, underline the fact that the House itself has never had an opportunity to give an expression of opinion on a matter of this kind. This motion, and particularly the amendment, gives the House and each member the opportunity to express an opinion on the appropriateness of a group of five members, in this case the Social Credit group, having the full status of other parties in respect of (a) the question period and (b) statements on motions in response to ministerial statements. We believe that we cannot extend that unqualified right in the present circumstances, and that is why we agree with the Prime Minister in not including a member of the Social Credit group as a member of the striking committee. To do so would be to carry with it the implications I have already described.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, and in an effort to provide the sense of the House, and certainly the sense of this group, we propose to vote against the amendment and to vote for the main motion proposed by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I say on behalf of the New Democratic Party that we regard this amendment as unnecessary, to put it in technical terms. I want also to say that we regret that it has been presented, and I shall indicate what I mean by that in a moment.

First, when I say that we regard the amendment as unnecessary, I would point out that the striking committee itself really has a very routine job. Sometimes in a whole Parliament it meets only two or three times. What it does is receive the lists from the various parties as to the persons to be put on the standing committees, and then in the name of the striking committee that report is presented to the House and adopted and the memberships are confirmed.

It is not a matter of great importance to be on the striking committee but, as has been indicated by the hon. member for Cape Breton Highlands-Canso (Mr. MacEachen), there is a principle involved that we have to consider.

The other reason I give for saying it is not necessary to have every group of members in this House represented on the committee is that on former occasions there have been times when various parties, either the Social Credit party or my party, were not on the committee. A number of years ago, for example, when our two parties were about the same size, in