

Striking Committee Report

MISS JEWETT—UNEMPLOYMENT IN LOWER MAINLAND OF B.C.

Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) should particularly note. This petition is signed by 699 members of the IWA in the lower mainland of the Province of British Columbia who are deeply distressed by massive lay-offs and the almost two million unemployed in this country.

The petition points out the failure to protect existing jobs or to create new jobs for the unemployed, and the inadequacies of the Unemployment Insurance Act in dealing with today's crisis.

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STANDING COMMITTEES

CONCURRENCE IN THIRD REPORT OF STRIKING COMMITTEE

Mr. Charles Turner (London East) moved:

That the third report of the Striking Committee, presented to the House on Monday, January 31, 1983, be concurred in.

He said: Madam Speaker, this is the first time in many years that a Striking Committee report has been debated. In fact, it is the first time in many years that there has been any substantial discussion about committee composition at all.

Until 1968, committees were very large. I understand that there were between 30 and 60 members of those committees, which had very little to do because the House sat for only three or four months at that time. When they did have an assignment and changes in membership were required, the Chief Government Whip had to propose a motion in the House that could be debated and was debated on at least one famous occasion.

In 1968, it was decided that the size of committees would be reduced, usually to about 20, but in the case of two popular committees—Agriculture and External Affairs and National Defence—they were struck at 30. Some committees, including special committees, were smaller. Substitutions became mere administrative concerns.

Last fall, the House adopted the recommendations of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure to reduce all standing committees to between 10 and 15 members on an experimental basis. The substitution rules were stiffened and a system of alternate members was instituted. As before, any Member of the House may attend and speak at any public committee meeting but does not have the right to vote.

Two of the standing committees, Agriculture and External Affairs and National Defence, had consisted of 30 members. It seemed clear that the maximum number of 15 members should be appointed to those committees. This meant that whenever the two Opposition Parties voted together against the Government, the chairman of the committee would have to cast the deciding vote. On our side, we were hesitant to place chairmen

in the position of constantly breaking ties and thereby appearing too partisan but in these two cases the need for maximum numbers prevailed.

It was decided by a majority of the Striking Committee that all of the other committees would have ten members. This would ensure that the chairman would be able to act in most circumstances as a mediator, without concern about being compelled to vote on a regular basis.

I have attended over 1,000 brotherhood meetings during my 27 and one-half years' service with the Canadian National Railways. I have also attended membership meetings and meetings of many other organizations and never once saw a president of the brotherhood, a service or fraternal club called upon to break a tie during any discussion.

At times, the language we heard at brotherhood meetings became a little rough around the edges. Sometimes debate was tough and very heavy. In fact, we used to say that there was more debate in the hotels across Canada and the cinders were flying all of the time. But when we went to lodge, a decision was made one way or the other.

I think the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) would agree that the parliamentary procedure during the meeting was first-class. The Hon. Paul Martin used to say when he attended union meetings that if you want to know parliamentary procedure, go to a union meeting.

I have attended many House of Commons committee meetings. Unless the witnesses were Ministers, officials of Departments or presidents of Crown corporations who were on the hot seat, less than half of the members of the committee were in attendance. This would reduce the number of the committee to below ten. Therefore, in my opinion, I believe that committees composed of ten members is a very sensible suggestion. It certainly allows more members to become experts in the subject of their choice. This also allows regular members to participate in committee debates more often and ask more questions. It also allows the chairperson to be strictly neutral on all subjects debated by the committees.

As I have mentioned, this new system is a one-year experiment. I urge the House to adopt my motion quickly so that the committee part of the experiment may commence and we could put all Members of the House back to work in the committees.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Comments, questions and answers.

Mr. Mayer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Hon. Member if he thinks the breakdown of a ten-member committee to six, three and one, with regard to the three Parties of the House, is fair, based on the fact that there are roughly 150 Government Members, 100 Members of this Party and 30 Members of the NDP? Does he think that the breakdown of six, three and one as it relates to 150, 100 and 30 is fair?

Mr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the chairman will not participate. Therefore, it would be five, three and one. I think that ten is the logical figure.