

Procedure Committee Report

of catch as catch can arrangement between the C.N.R. and the C.P.R. I cannot guarantee that, but that is my understanding. The fact is that this committee made a recommendation, but because the recommendation was contrary to government wishes the whole thing was allowed to die.

We need more honesty than that from government if committees are to be taken seriously. I had a bill, as did the hon. member for Red Deer, the subject matter of which was sent to a committee of the house. Reports by the committee which studied these bills have been tabled in the house. The report in respect of the bill of the hon. member for Red Deer, regarding an ombudsman, was only tabled a week or two ago, so I will not needle the government in respect of it. However, the recommendations of the committee which studied my bill regarding alterations to the Railway Act were tabled in this house more than a year ago. There has been a tremendous campaign carried on by railway organizations to have these recommendations accepted, but what have the government done in this regard? They have done absolutely nothing but a bit of face saving. Successive ministers of the Department of Transport have brushed off these recommendations. They have every right as responsible ministers to deny the wisdom of committee recommendations, but why can they not be honest with the committee members who have worked to draft these recommendations?

I suggest this is one of the great problems that parliamentary committees have faced in the past. Government ministers and senior administrators have not played fair in respect of recommendations and reports that have been made by committees. Instead, it is considered politic or good tactics to just let them die, to resort to all kinds of subterfuges and ambiguities in order to let things slide away. That is one of the reasons many members have a difficult time taking committees seriously, and one of the reasons why they have not achieved the stature in this parliament that they have in the British parliament.

Mr. Douglas: And in congress.

Mr. Fisher: My leader says "in congress". The congressional situation is very different. I happen to be one of those who tend to feel that almost by circumstances we will be forced to move toward giving members of parliament more power through committees of the house, and so subtly but unalterably

[Mr. Fisher.]

we are going to move toward the United States congressional committee system and away from the traditional British system. That happens to be my own personal view. I know it is just a trend I see and not something I share with my colleagues.

Mr. Churchill: Do you think it is better?

Mr. Fisher: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre asks "Do you think it is better?" It is better in this sense, that United States congressional committees are, I think, a real breeding ground for talent. I think the United States congressman and the United States senator really do learn a great deal about government, the factors that are at play and the pursuit of power. Through his participation in committees he is in touch with the people and with lobby organizations. I think there is a realism to it that our committees cannot have. Look at the situation the other day when we had the board of maritime trustees before the industrial relations committee. We have two parliamentary secretaries there, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour and the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, trying to run interference in order to see that the trustees were protected.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is quite clear that one of the rules of the house is that a member cannot reflect on or discuss the proceedings of any committee until the report of the committee has been laid before the house.

Mr. Byrne: He was there as a reporter.

Mr. Fisher: The minister would be quite right if I were speaking about what was before the committee in terms of subject matter, but I am talking about the behaviour of the people on the committee. Apparently we have a situation on the government side where the parliamentary secretaries do not have enough to do or else many of the other government members are not capable enough, so a great deal of the work in many of the committees has been carried out under the aegis of the parliamentary secretaries. I am not saying whether this is particularly good or bad, but they have been there in a sense as a protective device, which indicates the kind of attitude that the government in power has toward committees. When we see such a practice it surely is not the kind of thing to make us feel enthusiastic about the likelihood or possibility of reform. I suggest to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre