

*Debating Time Allotment*

*Votes and Proceedings for Friday, December 6, 1968:*

V. The Committee—Structure of the House

12. It will be apparent from the recommendations already made in relation to supply and the legislative process that your committee envisages a significant extension of the functions of the Standing Committees and in consequence a substantial strengthening of their importance and influence.

How we are throwing those words down the drain, Mr. Speaker!

They would become the forums in which the details of expenditure and legislation would be closely considered. They would investigate the operations and continuing programs of government departments and would develop areas of subject specialization. We would expect debate in the Standing Committees to be well-informed and pertinent; their members to become influential in the areas of their specialized experience; and their reports to the house to assume a critical significance related more closely to the national interest as a whole than to simple political differences. We also anticipate that the business of the house would be greatly expedited and handled more efficiently through exploiting the potential of the committee system of the house to the full.

If we are going to do to standing committees what the government has indicated, Mr. Speaker, those words might as well be torn from the record. May I draw Your Honour's attention to the fact that the Committee on Procedure and Organization is not now just a special committee as it was last December, but is a standing committee of the house. In fact, we asked for that in paragraph 15 of the same report from which I have been reading, and I quote again:

15. Your committee believes that a Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization should be established with the function of keeping the rules and practice and the internal administrative organization of the house under continuing review, and that this committee should consist of not more than twelve members. If the recommendations contained in your Committee's Fourth and Fifth Reports are implemented, we would urge that this proposed Standing Committee be given an opportunity of reviewing the revised Standing Orders after they have been in operation for a certain length of time.

I ask Your Honour to put those two paragraphs, 12 and 15, together and note how clear their message is. This was a report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. It was not necessary to adopt this report because it contained expressions of opinion as to how the house should operate. It was the basis for a later report which provided for actual changes in rules.

This afternoon Your Honour agreed with the contention that there had been a change with regard to third reading. That change is

reflected in this same report. Put those two paragraphs together, 12 and 15, and the message is very clear. We said that we wanted a new régime as far as committees were concerned. We wanted the importance of committee work to be strengthened, made more critical and crucial in the legislative process. We wanted members to develop expertise, specialized talent, in their particular fields. We wanted this to happen in all of the standing committees. With regard to procedure, we wanted the committee to have an opportunity to review the procedure and rules of the house so it could make recommendations back to the house. I submit this is not just exhortation. This is something the chair has to consider. There has been a change, just as this afternoon Your Honour had to say there had been a change with respect to the status of third reading.

I submit there has been a change in respect of the status of committees. They now exercise a more important part in the whole process of this parliament. For us to be faced with a situation in which a committee has given consideration to a matter, has made a report, only to have it completely upstaged by the action of a Minister of the Crown, is an affront to that committee. It is an affront to all members, especially those on the Liberal side, who voted for this proposition. It is an affront to parliament. We thought we were operating under a new régime.

Just as Your Honour had to say this afternoon that the old citations did not completely apply in view of the changes that have been made, so I suggest it is with respect to committees. Some new jurisprudence may be necessary. The facts are clear. Last December this matter was referred to the committee, which by that time had been made a standing committee. This committee was called upon to make a report. We spent months working on this and other issues. A report was decided on in the committee. My friends across the way like to laugh and say, I voted against it. I certainly did. I will get into that when we get into the substance of the matter. Technically speaking, the committee carried out its instruction. It brought back a report. It did so in the light of a new régime which says that the work of the committees has critical significance to the job that is being done in parliament. Then, we get here and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) puts this motion on the order paper which means that all the work we did last year in trying to upgrade the work of committees, to