

Privilege

I sought the unanimous consent and in all of our parliamentary history that has always been given for the formation of new committees, up until this fall. The McGrath committee report on reform of Parliament indicated that this should happen once a year so that members' privileges related to their membership on committees are protected and protected adequately, and that was done. But Standing Order 104 also states that we should have an opportunity to change those committees at the commencement of the fall session, each year. That is what should be happening in the House.

If we need to divide, that is fine. We should be dividing on that Striking Committee report. That is the remedy not only for the transport committee and the issues raised by the New Democratic Party Whip, but for some other situations as well that are becoming somewhat burdensome for members on all sides of the House.

During the course of the summer it is not unusual for opposition parties to change critics, as an example. It is not unusual for governments to change parliamentary secretaries and/or cabinet and responsibilities of one kind or another. That is what the summer in part, traditionally, has been for. We have Standing Order 104 so that we can then go into the fall session with those new assignments clearly related to the formation of committees.

I think the division on the members of the striking committee is simply one related to the size of our standing committee. The majority of members of the House, I think, feel clearly that those standing committees should be small rather than large.

If you look back on the attendance of those committees for the last couple of years, you will find that the poorest attendance relates to the committees that have been large. The best attendance relates to the committees that have been small.

I think you will find in particular that the obligation to be in attendance in the large committees has not been fulfilled more often by the opposition members than by government members. Attendance difficulty relates to their caucus and their sense of responsibility. It is difficult sometimes to be a critic in the full sense and also to be a member of the standing committee and to meet

both those obligations day in and day out. Certainly the attendance records of the House would show that.

We have had one other departure from normal over the summer, Mr. Speaker, in that we now have an abnormally large number of independents in the House. There are 13. Approximately 10 per cent of the opposition in the House is represented by independents. The striking committee report reflects that reality and provides a place on a proportional basis or reasonably so for independents in the House to participate in the standing committees of the House in a direct way, including a vote.

We did our best as a striking committee. If the opposition members who spoke earlier this day would like to divide on that committee report right now or later when we are called to the House perhaps for another division later this day, at any convenient time government members would be quite prepared to face that division, and if the committee report were affirmed, we would be off with the new committees. If it were rejected by the House then we would have to consider that situation in light of our standing orders.

It is incorrect, Mr. Speaker, to say that my action constitutes the remedy for the dilemma which the New Democratic Party proposes. The remedy, according to our standing orders, should be the normal practice of the House on accepting the striking committee report which was tabled in this House on October 5. That is about 25 days ago. Certainly in my conversations with members on all sides of the House, they would prefer that the striking committee report be accepted. That would be the preferred model I think for most, if not all, members of the House, but the only way we would know that for sure is simply to divide.

I would ask that you seek unanimous consent at this point to divide on that issue now and then I think you could avoid having to rule on the question of privilege.

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, my remarks will be brief, too, but I feel I must add to this argument being put to you and I hope that you can come to speedy resolution on the situation.

The chief government Whip is speaking on two considerations for your deliberation. On the one hand he regrets the process being undermined because in part 106, the part of the situation he claims he is in because of the situation of appointing a chairman to those committees. On the other hand, the chief government Whip has