

*Concurrence in Committee Report*

the past year when the ratio between government and Official Opposition Members on committees has been two to one.

Further, the NDP has gained in the make-up of the two 15-Member committees whether measured in terms of per cent, 13 per cent, or in a ratio comparison of eight to five to two. Again, on those committees it has been the Official Opposition that has been penalized. We are not requesting changes to these larger committees, but we do believe it is reasonable, equitable and fair that after a year of under-representation on committees this Party be given its just share of seats on the smaller standing committees for the remaining few months of this Parliament.

The stated fear by the Government that our proposal would undermine the non-partiality, independence or neutrality of committee chairmen by requiring them continually to break the votes is entirely without substance. While it may be expected that committee chairmen on procedural matters display a degree of non-partiality, there is no Member naive enough to believe that in a crunch chairmen of standing committees would act in any way other than a partisan manner.

The special committee on parliamentary reform recommended establishing a panel of neutral chairmen for the proposed legislative committees, but recommended nothing along this line; that is, nothing in terms of a neutral chairman for the standing committees.

At this point perhaps we should review the recommendations of the special committee on parliamentary reform as they concern the operation of the committee system.

In the third report, item (1) concerns the size of committees. This would mean between 10 and 15 Members—not just 10, but between 10 and 15 Members—on standing committees. “This will provide for the possibility of fluctuations in proportional Party membership from Parliament to Parliament”. That item has been more or less implemented.

Item (2) is substitution. For each member of a standing committee there shall be an alternate member from the same Party. Changes in the membership of a committee will require notification 24 hours in advance of a committee meeting. An alternate member could act only in the absence of one of the regular members from his or her own Party and could only then be counted in the quorum of the committee. That item has been implemented.

Item (3) is automatic referral of annual reports, the power of committees to initiate inquiries granted through automatic referral of annual reports by Departments, Crown corporations, including their subsidiaries, and other agencies to the appropriate standing committees immediately after tabling of such reports in the House. That has largely been implemented, though we do not get many reports tabled.

Item (4) is Government response to committee reports. It states that the Government should be required, if a committee so requests, to table a response to committee reports within 120 days. That recommendation has been implemented.

Item (5) is special committees. The use of special committees should increase. Their size should be kept as small as possible and there should be no change of membership unless agreed by the committee. The committees have the authority to make interim and final reports public. That has been implemented. However, there are a number of reforms which have been recommended by the special committee dealing with committees which have not as yet been implemented.

In the fifth report item (6) is a mechanism to convene the committees of the House. All House committees should be convened within 10 sitting days following the adoption of the Striking Committee report to elect a chairman and a vice-chairman. During a session any four members of a standing committee can request, giving reasons, that the committee be convened. That recommendation has not as yet been adopted.

In the sixth report, item (7) refers to legislative committees. Within five sitting days after second reading of any Bill not referred to Committee of the Whole, a report from the Striking Committee would establish a legislative committee not to exceed 20 members, which would include the member having responsibility for the Bill—in the case of Government Bills, the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary—as well as the Opposition spokesmen for the subject area. That recommendation has not been introduced or adopted because of the Government's attitude.

Item (8) deals with a panel of chairmen. At the beginning of each session no fewer than ten Members shall be appointed by the Speaker to act as neutral and independent chairmen of the legislative committees. That is where this neutral chairman comes in—on legislative committees not on standing committees. That recommendation has not been introduced because of the Government's failure to move ahead with parliamentary reform.

● (1530)

In the seventh report, item (9), financial accountability committees, reflecting the belief that accountability is fundamentally important in a parliamentary democracy, the reform committee recommended that in addition to the Public Accounts Committee, the following committees are needed to ensure increased financial accountability: a fiscal framework committee, an expenditure proposals committee, a government corporations and agencies committee, and a liaison committee. That very important recommendation cannot be implemented because the Government refused to go ahead with parliamentary reform.

Finally, in item (10) in the seventh report, there is a call for improved resources, facilities and intercommunication for all committees.

It is clear that Parliament is not going to act on those recommendations not contained in the third report of the special committee. Nevertheless, we should seek to adopt in spirit and in attitude the feelings of the committee proposing the reforms, at least in the terms implementing the recommendations of the third report. My Party's proposals with regard to committee makeup, recommending a membership of 11 for