

Mr. Mayer: What about six Liberals and three Conservatives?

Mr. Deans: My colleague wants to usurp his ten-minute question period by asking me whether six Liberal Members to three Conservatives is fair and supportable. The answer is no.

We are forced to work within the restrictions imposed by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedures, however. It said that committees, when established, could be no fewer than ten in number and no larger than 15. In order to achieve the proportion that the House might well reflect by formula, we would have five, three and one. But that would be nine members. Unfortunately, that is one less than the minimum number the House adopted as being suitable for the smaller committees.

Mr. Mayer: What about seven, four and two?

Mr. Deans: Seven, four and two, as offered by the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer), would be quite acceptable to us, but I want to point out to him that it would be unfair inasmuch as there would then be only four Conservatives for two New Democrats. That would be out of proportion. That is equally true of the larger committees. The trouble is that the numbers recommended and accepted really do not divide reasonably and fairly with the present composition of the House of Commons. At the large end it should have been 17, and at the small end it should have been nine. Those numbers would have given us the proper numbers of members on committees and at the same time would have allowed for fair, equitable and proportional representation.

I want to say to the Government, and to the Official Opposition, as I have said privately and publicly before, that this Party would be quite prepared to accept an amendment to establish nine and 17. I know the Chairman of the Committee is not surprised to hear me say that as he knows it is my view. I am prepared to accept any number that will adequately allow for representation on the committees that is in keeping with the numbers in the House of Commons. However, we should face the fact that the House of Commons will not always be made up in the way it is now. We hope there will be fewer Conservatives and fewer Liberals next time and then the New Democrats will, as the Government, in all fairness to the other two Parties, make sure they are adequately represented. That is our common practice.

The argument about the numbers as proposed by the Conservative spokesman, the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby), is unacceptable. Let me offer an amendment that could have been acceptable had it been put. If someone in the House of Commons were of a mind to move that, though the number in the small committees be ten, the chairman be appointed from among a number of chairmen submitted by each of the Parties in proportion to their representation in the House of Commons and that the chairman would, in every instance, be seen to be impartial and would be required to vote only on that very rare occasion when a tie is apparent and to follow the normal processes of people who chair committees on

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those occasions and vote to continue the deliberations, as is the normal practice, then I suggest on behalf of this Party that we would support that amendment.

In essence, it would mean that on the smaller committees there would be ten people, nine of whom would be voting members. Five would be from the Government, three from the Official Opposition and one from the New Democratic Party. There would be a chairman who may or may not come from the governing side of the House, depending on which committee was involved. That chairman would be seen by all to be impartial and would be seen by all to operate in the interest of the committee rather than in the interests of the political Party he or she represents.

I do not know how anyone could argue that that would not be a fair and reasonable way to approach this problem. Some may say that that is not what was proposed during the deliberations of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure. I think I could safely say that a proposal in that form truly was not made. However, there was a discussion and there have been ongoing discussions about the desirability of impartiality in the chair and about the desirability of looking at, and perhaps adapting to or adopting, the method used in Great Britain of a panel of chairmen or chairpeople. From among senior Members of the House of Commons—and that does not mean only those who are older but even the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) might fall into the category of senior Member, young though he is—would be drawn those who have a demonstrated capacity to chair in an impartial way.

• (1430)

Let us say for the sake of argument that there were 12 committees. Perhaps seven of them could be chaired by Government appointees during a session of Parliament at the Government's behest or by using some other fancy method, I do not care; perhaps four or five members could come from the Tory Party and one or two from the NDP, depending upon how the numbers break down; and that would continue through that session of Parliament. This would achieve the result the Government would like to see achieved—impartiality.

I know the Chairman of the Committee is an honourable person. When he says that he hopes to see that degree of impartiality, with the chairman not having to become involved in every picayune item which arises, I know it is a desirable objective. If we could follow what I am suggesting as a possibility, we could achieve that result. We could achieve what the Conservatives desire in terms of the impartiality and not overloading committees with Members from the Government side. Also we would give senior Members of Parliament a somewhat different role to play, a role which would respond to their natural abilities. Take my colleague, the Hon. Member for Mission-Port Moody (Mr. Rose), for example—

An Hon. Member: You take him.