

existing or proposed government legislation but also with respect to possible new policy directions for government in important issue areas; sixth, to provide individuals and groups within the community with a more direct influence upon policy through the calling of witnesses; seventh, to provide for the development within Parliament of cadres of experts in each of the major areas of government concern.

I hope hon. members will forgive me if because of time limitation I simply state, without documenting the position, that the committee system has not worked quite as we had hoped it would. I believe most members could find many arguments to support this contention. In establishing the committee system, Parliament gave up a number of its more effective controls of executive powers, such as the study of estimates in committee of the whole at which time grievances could be raised with the government with some effect. We have lost that control and the committee system has not replaced it with another.

The last five functions which I mentioned of the committee system as established have particular relevance to the problem of controlling the executive. The seventh point I mentioned, the creation of cadres of experts in this House, has the greatest impact of all since it has the effect of reducing the information gap which exists between the private Member of Parliament and the cabinet minister. Parliament's power to supervise has declined because of the increasing demands being made on its time and because its members are representative men and women best equipped to deal with general principles, broad objectives and fundamental issues. It is not a technical body. In any given subject area in relation to the expertise of a civil servant, the average member is ill-equipped and ill-informed.

Moreover, the same is true of the average member in relation to the cabinet minister. Cabinet ministers can draw upon the talents and resources of the legions of public service experts, which the cabinet controls, for necessary information in any field. With rare exceptions, such as the audit office, Parliament can call upon no such able assistants. The result is that the debates in the House are rather unequal. The ability of Parliament to adequately assess and scrutinize every government action is severely reduced.

• (4:10 p.m.)

The committees would have the potential to remedy this situation if their membership were more stable—in other words, in Members of Parliament remained on a given committee for a longer period of time, were not shuffled about so frequently and if there were periodic adjournments of the House for the purpose of enabling committees to do their work. A number of different systems have been suggested with regard to the latter point. I will not go into them here but will content myself by saying that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization should be instructed to seek the most satisfactory means of providing committees with the time they need to do their work properly without interference of duties in the house.

It is with the same end in view, that of enhancing the ability of committees to reduce the information gap between Parliament and the government, that I have

#### *Suggested Improvements to Committee System*

recommended in my resolution that committees be provided with adequate staff support. I refer especially to research staff who would possess the expert knowledge necessary to assist Members of Parliament in preparing themselves adequately for their various committee duties. The value of such staff has been made manifestly obvious by the work Mr. Peter Dobel and the Parliamentary Research Centre have done in connection with the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence.

There is a problem in deciding whether such staff should be permanent or rotating, assigned to a single committee or moved from committee to committee as required. I tend to opt for a permanent staff, but the point that able research staffs of some description are urgently required by committees is what I want to establish at this time.

A related suggestion which I have made in the resolution is that the standing committee be permitted as a matter of course to act as a committee of inquiry. I regret that my wording of this recommendation and, more particularly, my failure to note that the words "Committees of Inquiry" were capitalized on the order paper may have led to some confusion on the part of hon. members about my intention. All I mean to suggest is that the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, for example, in the situation now confronting the nation should consider it to be a normal part of its duties to inquire into the relationship between inflation and unemployment or into the possible effects of the American DISC program upon our economy and, accordingly, make appropriate policy recommendations in these fields. Such a development would have the two major beneficial effects of better equipping Parliament to assess government policy decisions in these areas and perhaps even giving Parliament an important role in shaping eventual government policies.

Another group of recommendations contained in this resolution is designed to give committee recommendations more importance and to create a system in which it would be difficult for a government to ignore the recommendations of a committee. There has been no attempt to get away from the concept of cabinet responsibility or to give power to the committees to initiate legislation but, rather, simply to ensure that the cabinet would have to seriously examine committee proposals. Whether the government would act on the basis of committee recommendations would remain its decision. I want to ensure that the government would have to examine committee proposals seriously.

Hence I have suggested that it be made mandatory for a motion of concurrence to be moved in connection with all committee reports and that such a motion be deemed debatable. This would provide two salutary effects: first, the recommendations of the committee would be aired in public; second, if concurrence was granted the government would be forced to explain its reasons for failing to act upon a recommendation of the committee. It would have to pay more attention to what the committees did.

Obviously, this suggestion poses problems with regard to the time of the House. As I note in the resolution, a means would have to be discovered for limiting debate. Perhaps a Standing Order could provide that only a certain number of reports could be debated in a session or,