

Striking Committee Report

members. I feel that it detracts from their role as Members of Parliament and from their capacity to act. I do not see any enhancement there.

The Hon. Member said that, independent from the structure of the Party hierarchy, the Whips will have less power. The Whips have more power. In fact, the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River just finished indicating that he was not happy with what his Whip had done to him because he lost his position on several committees. The Whip does not have less power, the Whip has more power. He has more power to choose because he has more people from which to choose for more seats. Instead, we will find out that it will be back to the old tradition, with the Whips appointing the ones who keep their seats the warmest, not necessarily the ones out working in External Affairs and other areas, or those who put in extra energy, and sometimes the two go together but not necessarily.

The Hon. Member also said that private Members do not want authority. Private Members do want authority, but is this accomplished? What authority have they gained? What power have I gained as a private Member? I do not see any power that I have gained as a Private Member. I see limitations, but I see no power, because there has been no power transferred, only the ability to hear and make recommendations. There is no power to legislate or real power to control money. We saw the Estimates taken out of the House of Commons, and we thought it was great and we would have more to discuss. The Estimates are a farce. The House has no control and the committee has no control over spending. It did not work. It was a nice intention, but I am afraid that will happen here, too.

This report, if adopted, will also eliminate opportunity for the newcomer. Some people have been on this side of the House for ten years but they will not sit on a committee because the cuts are 37 deep. They are no longer on committee. How can one call what happened to other persons "opportunity"? I know of one Hon. Member who came here ten years ago with some hope, but he cannot even sit on a committee now. It is absolutely disgusting to see what is being done, at least what I think is being done.

There is no authority and no power. There is only pretence. There is a pretence at democracy rather than the practice of democracy. I am very concerned that the right of private Members to act is not being enhanced here. It will depend on the intent of the Government, but every time one passes power on to the Government, one gives up the authority of the House of Commons. Authority of the House of Commons is perhaps being transferred somewhat, but that transfer may result in reduced authority, not increased authority.

The proof will be in the eating, but I think we are being had here. Let us remember that this is a one year process. This is not even necessarily a precedent, because the whole matter will be reviewed in one year. Let us have that clearly understood. One year from now, if I have not experienced more authority as a Member of the Opposition, as a private Member, and if these 37 other Hon. Members have not somehow found ways to express themselves, ways which have now been cut off, then

maybe we had better look to a revision and the continuation of past practice.

Does the Government really mean what it is talking about, this reform? Will it continue with the next stage and the stage after that, or will this be it, in reality? That reality will be tested, as will the intent of the Government. I remain skeptical and doubtful, especially when the Government will not accept a simple amendment which is brought forward in good faith and which would permit a few more of our Members, not 37 Members, to have some small role to play. I cannot understand why the Government will not accept a little compromise so that a few more Hon. Members can have that right. The Government would maintain its control. It has its control because there are so few Hon. Members who are supposedly fighting for these positions. The Government does not have to worry about its quorum. They will be there now. They have to fight for their positions.

Mr. Turner: They were not there before.

Mr. Wenman: They were not there before, you are darn right, but I can tell the Hon. Member that they were there in the External Affairs Committee on the Conservative side, and we had people fighting for those spots all the time, 11 people, and we had to cut them off and decide who would get on. We do not have that problem, and it is our people who are in fact being cut. It is the power of the Opposition which is being cut, and that check and balance is being destroyed once more in another long series of chains which have come in from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), and the Hon. Member has admitted it here. The Prime Minister, through his prerogative, has taken authority away from here. You are darn right, it has been taken. It has been taken by the Prime Minister in the last series of reforms which, under a guise, saw the transfer of authority and power.

I regret this, and I remain skeptical. One year from now, we will evaluate this matter and it will take much more than one day, unless there is much more good intent, much more than I have seen from the Government in the last ten years.

• (1630)

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the problem we have run up against today with regard to the 10 man committees is that under the old structure of numbers which gave the Government a clear majority plus the chairman of the committee, a situation has developed where the Opposition numbers are so small that they do not have enough representation on the committee. For example, on the Finance Committee, of which I was chairman, the Government had a clear majority, plus the chairman. Those were 20 person committees. The Government had 11 members, the Official Opposition had 7 members and the NDP had 2 members. Not considering the chairman, that is a 10 to 9 ratio. The Government had a clear majority, and the chairman could be independent.

Quite frankly I would like to ask the Hon. Member if, when such questions arise, it is not his opinion that not only are these