

*Striking Committee Report*

which in effect would fly in the face of that general trend towards more impartial and independent committees. Let us face it, Mr. Speaker, the chairmen of standing committees are Government Members—

**Mr. Lambert:** Why?

**Mr. Collenette:** —and obviously they have to be very sensitive at present to what the Government wants. Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) on the far side of the House would hold his counsel, he will have his chance to speak.

**Mr. Deans:** On the far right.

**Mr. Collenette:** On the far right or the far left. I would ask him to show courtesy in this House as befits his former office.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that the Hon. Member for Halifax West is contradicting his own argument, because some of us do believe we have to move towards independent chairmen of committees where they do not take orders from the Government. Some of us believe we should emulate the British system where half the chairmen of select committees are drawn from the Opposition.

**Some Hon. Members:** Question.

**Mr. Collenette:** Mr. Speaker, let us have a civilized debate here. People are asking me to ask a question and they should realize this is a period where we can make a brief statement, which I have been trying to do, as well as ask a question.

I would like to hear from the Hon. Member for Halifax West how he answers this question. If we adopt his amendment it will mean that on every single procedural as well as substantive item in committee the chairman, who is now a Government Member, will be forced to break a tie. If we are talking about good faith, then surely this is no way to have good faith.

**Mr. Crosby:** Mr. Speaker, the only indication that there is going to be neutrality or a judicious attitude on the part of chairmen of parliamentary standing committees comes from the Hon. Member for London East in his speech today, and that is not good enough for me. That is the simple answer.

I hope the Hon. Member was not announcing a new Government policy which will prevent Members of the Opposition from being chairmen of parliamentary standing committees. I hope this does not mean that the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee will pass from the Opposition back to the Government, or the chairmanship of the Members' Services Committee will pass from the Opposition back to the Government. I hope that is not what the Hon. Member for London East had in mind when he said we would have judicious chairmen. However, the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) also has some thoughts he would like to express.

• (1420)

**Mr. Mayer:** Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments. The House unanimously adopted the report of the

Committee which recommended that the membership of standing committees be composed of not less than ten and not more than 15 members. I see three Members of the Government opposite who were on the Committee that I am pleased to be part of. They will agree that not once, when discussing the size of committees, did we discuss the possibility of having committee chairmen who would be totally neutral. As I understand it, the rules in committee are an extension of what goes on in the House. In the House the Speaker, if called upon, has to vote if there is a tie. I do not see why, all of a sudden, we should change the committee structure when it is really supposed to be an extension of the House.

Standing Order 13 reads as follows:

The Speaker shall not take part in any debate before the House. In case of an equality of voices, the Speaker gives a casting vote—

It is the Speaker who, if called upon, has to break a tie in the House. What is wrong with allowing more Members to participate in the committee structure, which is exactly what we tried to do in the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure?

All of a sudden we are faced with this question of neutrality. I would put a little more stock in the opinion of Government Members if they would offer an amendment that no committee chairman would ever vote. Members who attend committees regularly will have to agree that Members of the Government have a poor record of attendance. If they now want to say that when there are only three Members of the Government attending a committee and one happens to be the committee chairman, then, even if the vote would be lost, the committee chairman would not vote, I think there would be some credence to their position that committee chairmen will be non-partisan. Until that happens, they are simply trying to juggle the numbers on the committee to suit the Government so that they do not need to have any more Members on committee than they had in the past.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the Hon. Member but the ten minutes provided for the question and answer period have expired. I am sure the Hon. Member will have an opportunity to participate in the debate.

**Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain):** At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the amendment proposed by the spokesman for the Conservative Party. It is not at all unlike an amendment offered during the time the Steering Committee was meeting. The Hon. Member's argument for fairness falls short of credibility and that is unfortunate. I agree that proportional representation as set out in the Striking Committee's report might not be entirely accurate. If one were to look at the position the spokesman for the Conservative Party takes, then one must come to the conclusion that a division of three Conservatives and one New Democratic Party Member is fair and equitable and, therefore, supportable, but that a division of four Conservatives and one New Democrat is grossly unfair and inequitable and is therefore unsupportable.