

Suggested Improvements to Committee System

private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions, public bills and private bills.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS**HOUSE OF COMMONS****SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO COMMITTEES SYSTEM**

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, there should be further improvements made in the operation of the committee system in order to enhance the influence of the House of Commons upon the policy-making process and in order to reduce the information gap between private members and cabinet ministers and to that end that the following subject-matters be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization for the purpose of study and the making of recommendations (a) the possibility of establishing a means whereby committees could take the initiative in recommending to the House matters which should be referred to them by the House; (b) adequate staff support for committees; (c) the advisability of making it mandatory for each committee to prepare at the end of each Session a running record of recommendations it has made to the government and government action taken on its recommendations; (d) making it mandatory for a motion of concurrence to be moved in connection with all committee reports and discovering a means by which debate on such motions could be kept to a reasonable level, specifically the possibility of increasing the number of assigned days, the increase in number to be allocated to the discussion of committee reports, the reports to be considered to be determined by opposition parties; (e) making it possible for minority reports to be tabled together with majority reports from committees; (f) allowing Standing Committees to be constituted as committees of inquiry.

• (4:00 p.m.)

He said: Mr. Speaker, traditionally Parliament serves three separate but related functions in discharging its ultimate responsibility to the elector. Those are, the formulation of policy, the implementation of policy through legislation, and the collection and allocation of funds necessary for the effective operation of legislation. Parliament, of course, performs many other functions but all, in theory at least, are ancillary to the three I have mentioned.

In Canada the right of Parliament to formulate policy and to legislate for the implementation of policy was established with the passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill and the according of responsible government in 1848. The principle of parliamentary control of finance was established at the same time. The only remaining practical exceptions to the full implementation of the principle were removed in 1849 and 1851 with the repeal of the English navigation laws by Westminster and the passage of Sir Francis Hinck's new tariff laws, respectively.

After a relatively brief period in which parliamentary control over policy, legislation and finance was consolidated there began a gradual erosion of that control which first became apparent after the turn of the century and which became a cause for active concern following World War II. Gradually Parliament came to exercise control over policy, legislation and finances in name only. The real power, the real control was in the hands of the cabinet and the bureaucracy which served it. In recent

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

years there has been a further pyramiding of power in these three crucial areas with the full cabinet being eclipsed by an inner circle of ministers and, more recently, by the Prime Minister's office.

It is only slightly overdrawing the case to say that in 125 years we have gone full circle from legislatures being relatively weak advisers to and opposition for the government, to full legislative control and responsibility and back again to a situation in which the legislature is in fact of only peripheral importance in the governing of the nation. Parliament stands in danger of becoming, as has the monarchy, a largely honorific element in the constitution.

I make these remarks in no partisan sense. What has happened in Canada is happening throughout the world. The decline of the power of Parliament in relation to the cabinet and the first minister has been allowed to proceed as far as it has in part because the process was neither the result of stated policy nor, for the most part, of conscious effort. The change is, rather, the result of innumerable individual decisions made on a pragmatic basis over a long period of time and as a consequence of two major developments—the growth in the scope of responsibility of the modern state and the marked strengthening of party discipline which has taken place since confederation.

Whatever the reasons for the change, whatever the reasons for the phenomenon of the decline in power of the legislative arm of government in relation to the executive arm, it is absolutely necessary for us to use every means at our disposal to attempt to halt the trend, if not reverse it. I make this assertion not because of some antiquarian concern for the dignity of the House but, rather, because the more power becomes concentrated, the less responsive is the government to the felt needs of the people. I have no doubt that this very concentration of power is producing the current, entirely legitimate demands for "people power" in democratic states, if I may use that term to describe the phenomenon, and is producing as well some of the less savoury aspects of that movement.

It is within this context that I wish to discuss my suggestions for change in our current committee system, for I see the committee system as having the greatest immediate potential for beginning the process of re-establishing, in fact, the control of the executive by the legislature or, to put it another way, ensuring the responsibility and accountability of the cabinet to Parliament.

Our present committee system, which was first set up in 1965 on a trial basis and was given formal approval by the House in December, 1968, was designed to fulfil a number of functions most of which have relevance to the question of adequate controls on the executive. The committee system was designed, first to save the time of the House and to streamline its operation by reducing the amount of time spent in committee of the whole in clause by clause study of legislation and in examination of the estimates; second, to provide government backbenchers especially with a means of becoming involved in the work of government in a meaningful way; third, to provide for the careful scrutiny of legislation; fourth, to provide for detailed and more comprehensive examination of proposals for departmental expenditures through referral of the estimates; fifth, to provide forums for enquiry not only for