

Privileges and Elections

63 of the act, could be deleted from the terms of reference.

Further, it is incumbent on the President of the Privy Council to tell the House now whether there are any other matters affecting electoral reform on which the government has already made up its mind—as it has a right to do; after all, it is the government. Let us not go through all this again. If there are matters upon which the government has already reached a decision, the minister should inform us now and delete those subjects from the committee's terms of reference. Even better, he should bring in a bill dealing with those matters which have already been decided, and the committee could consider it while it is considering the other sections of the Act. The President of the Privy Council owes this to the House, if for no other reason than as a gesture of sincerity and intent. Let us not bypass the terms of reference of a standing committee. No matter how minor the decision, let the government disclose it, instead of allowing the committee to spend fruitless hours debating the subject.

● (5:40 p.m.)

I have said all I want to say for the moment on this matter. I hope the motion will pass and that the government will recognize the points made this afternoon by members on this side of the House. While there may be difficulties of a partisan nature with other committees, this is surely one committee where there should not be such difficulties. The government should feel free to be completely open and honest with the opposition. If they are, the committee will accept its proposals on those terms and will be able properly to deal with matters put before them.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Like so many others, Mr. Speaker, I want to underline what the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) said in rather moderate terms, namely that this is a tough act to follow. I had hoped there would not be quite so wide-sweeping observations about the actions of various committees because, if one looks at the committee system as a whole, some committees are working very well. I have had a fair amount of experience with committees over the years, and while some can stand a great deal of improvement, others are operating smoothly. I, too, have some very grave reservations about some of the decisions that have been taken by committees, decisions that were more or less unilateral,

taken without consulting Mr. Speaker, whose budget is thereby affected.

For those who feel that committees should remain chairbound in Ottawa, let me say there are far too many regions of this country that are a big blank map to the majority of members. Very shortly we will be considering a bill dealing with national parks. I remember a committee visiting some of our national parks, and it was just as well it did because two thirds of the members had never been in a mountain national park in their lives. Yet they were being asked to declare their views on government policy on national parks.

This also brings to mind a newspaper article I saw the other day written by a political scientist from the University of Toronto, who thought that committees were benefiting far more from actions of government members on the committees. On the broadcasting committee two years ago, 26 out of 29 amendments accepted by the committee were moved by government members. What happened was that amendments were typed out on slips of paper and handed to government members to put forward, and this is how they were accepted. This sort of thing happens all too often. Someone whose knowledge of this institution is in inverse proportion to his distance from the institution comes here to present general statements and observations, and this sort of thing does more harm than good.

In regard to the terms of reference of this committee, I, too, would have preferred to see the government move in a much more acceptable way than referring to this matter in the way it did in the Speech from the Throne. I should have liked to see the government accept certain recommendations made by the House. After all, the cabinet is responsible to the House. This House does not exist as a mere rubber stamp for the executive. If you try to get that point across, frankly you are looked at with wide open eyes by certain members of the cabinet.

I think other matters should have been included in the terms of reference. I would have thought the whole question of elections should have been examined, outside of the question of election expenses which are not relevant to this discussion at all. We might also have had the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act referred to the Committee for examination. I say that because this legislation has received but one test in practice. Immediately the electoral boundaries commissions made their reports, we saw how impractical was the method adopted. It left members