

Personnel Changes in Standing Committees

hon. member and changing a decision previously made. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a decision the Liberal party can make; it is now a matter for the house to decide. One of my colleagues has pointed out to me that it will take five Liberals to take the place of the hon. member; certainly that is the effect of the motion now before us.

The Liberal party, the New Democratic party, the Conservative party and the other parties in the house, as parties, have a very cosy arrangement for appointing members to committees. But, Mr. Speaker, eventually we must face the fact that the independent members, as members of parliament and as representatives of ridings, have a right to play some role in the operations of committees of parliament if those committees are really to be part of the democratic process, allowing what we consider to be the free expression of all opinions.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that like myself all hon. members will take this matter seriously. I have never felt that members of one party should have the right to ask members of other parties to assist them in disciplining a member of their own party. I hope the members of the Liberal party will not see fit to assist in disciplining the members of my party; certainly I am not pleased that they should invite me to participate in disciplining a member of their party. I hope other hon. members will reject this invitation and will preserve the membership of these committees as initially established. If as an independent the hon. member failed to do his job on those committees, then it would be the responsibility of the chairman to cite him and ask the house to take some action. But I do not think the present action should be taken because he has involuntarily changed his political affiliation.

• (3:10 p.m.)

Mr. E. Nasserden (Rosthern): Mr. Speaker, I believe that seldom in the history of this parliament has there been presented a more arrogant motion than the one now before us for consideration. I believe it to be an intrusion into the independence of members of the house and an arrogant denial of democracy itself. Most members realize that they are elected first as members of parliament. Supporters of political parties they are, it is true, but they are elected first as members of parliament. To have a motion of this kind come before the house in an endeavour to stifle the effectiveness of a member of this house who, for one reason or another, does not see eye to

eye with the political party with which he is affiliated, or with some minister with whom he is associated, is to my mind a denial of the very fundamentals that underline our Canadian democratic system.

I do not say that I agree with everything or anything the hon. member for York-Humber has said in the House of Commons; but when the whip of the government party brings forward a motion like this and in one swoop tries to take away a member's privilege to sit on house committees, he is striking at the heart of parliament.

I say too, sir, that considering the lip service this government has paid to the effectiveness of committee work, this motion is all the more despicable. Regardless of whether we have agreed in the past two years with the statements the hon. member for York-Humber has made, we know he is one of the best documented members in this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nasserden: He has done his homework. Not only that, but he has gone into committees and voiced his opinions and come into this house and voiced his opinions without fear. I recall that in a previous parliament, on one matter I thought important I differed with the official thinking of my party. The Speaker of that day gave me an opportunity to speak even though others said it would be better if I kept quiet. I believe this house must recognize that members have a right to express their independent opinions. Surely an independent member of the House of Commons is entitled to sit on some committees of the house. Surely his electors sent him here for that purpose.

I submit that for a political party, because it has decided to kick out one of its members, to take away the privilege of that member to sit on committees, is absolutely unforgivable arrogance, and I believe the government has made a serious mistake. I hope they will reconsider the whole matter. Perhaps in serving on five committees the hon. member has done more in this regard than most other members, but surely he is entitled to sit on some committees of this house. For these reasons I oppose this motion.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, today we have witnessed another government blunder.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.