

Report of Special Committee

in case of a disagreement, the Chairman would have the deciding vote and thus lose his objectivity.

These are matters which can be considered and should be examined. They are matters on which about 20 Members of Parliament have agreed, but they must be analyzed in the larger context. First of all our experience is not yet completed. Should we agree permanently upon the principle of 25 committees, each made up of 10 members? Would it not be desirable, in view of the number of additional committees proposed by the Committee on Parliamentary Reform, to consider reducing the number of committees?

● (1230)

[English]

Mr. McGrath: Ten-Member committees were not on.

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. If the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) wants to ask a question, I am willing to give an answer. However, I am asking him an important question. I know he has studied seriously this matter, because together we attended a seminar on parliamentary procedure in Great Britain seven years ago, in 1976. I know his question is by no means futile, but I would like to direct a question to him, and after my comments he will have ten minutes for questions. Could he tell me whether the various committees recommended in the seven reports, in which concurrence is now requested, will be added to the twenty standing committees of the House and five joint committees of the House and Senate? We know that at present there are some 80 out of 284 members who make the committee system work. This is not new. It has been like that since I have been sitting here. No more than 80 members take part, in committee proceedings. There are 25 committees and we are asked to add ten or twelve depending on the number of bills passed on second reading. Is it realistic to think that 80 members who can hardly keep 25 committees going will be able to sit on 35 or 40 committees? Those are serious questions and if we want Parliament to operate effectively they deserve in-depth consideration.

Mr. Speaker, the point I want to make is that the Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform has considered the changes to be made in specific areas, but it is essential now to consider those reports and recommendations in the whole context of the parliamentary system and the reform process. As far as the reform process is concerned, several changes have been made since 1968. We have now made an experience which should normally end on December 21. A Senate committee is now working on Senate reform but major changes in the way of dealing with the estimates cannot be strictly considered for the House of Commons, if it is not known what will happen to Senate reform, because all those changes must be looked at as a whole and seriously considered so that once they are enforced they will become part of permanent reform.

But to rush through, under these circumstances would seem to me to be both ill-advised and ill-timed, to say the least. Members of the opposition may be trying to make political gains, while delaying the debate on a controversial bill, perhaps in the hope of embarrassing the government. There could not be any other motivation behind the position which some members of the Progressive Conservative Party have adopted. The fact that on the basis of only one report, they insist on our accepting the seven subsequent reports without debate, while the current experience has not yet been completed, seems to support my argument.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker—and we have had the opportunity to deal with this previously—there has been a constant and very real progress since 1968, although I wish it had been more rapid. Hon. members will remember that in 1968 the budget for each and everyone of our caucus research bureau was some \$30,000 or \$35,000. Now, it has increased considerably, so that we can carry out better our duties as Parliamentarians, which include preparing our bills better for introduction, discussion and debate in the House and, generally, assuming our responsibilities. I first quoted these figures in a speech which I delivered in the House on or about March 18, 1982.

On or about March 18, 1982—what am I saying?—on November 29, 1982, I indicated that the funds provided for each caucus research bureau had been increased from the \$35,000 level of the fiscal year 1969-70. For the fiscal year 1982-83, the funds provided to the caucus research bureaus are \$601,000 in the case of the government party, \$541,000 in the case of the official opposition party, and \$285,000 for the NDP. Mr. Speaker, the funds provided to the caucus research bureaus have been increased, from \$35,000 in the fiscal year 1969-70, to over half a million in the case of the two main political parties and to some \$300,000 in the case of the NDP. Over and above that, the Leader of the Official Opposition was entitled to \$87,500 in 1969-70 for the operation of his office. At this time, he is entitled in this regard to over one million dollars. The Hon. Member for Central Nova (Mr. Mulroney), the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, is entitled today to over a million dollars per year to hire the personnel required to prepare the questions he directs to us on the few occasions he chooses to come to the House. This involves more than \$1 million a year, whereas in 1968-69, that same office occupied by another Leader of the Opposition, nonetheless the same Official Opposition Leader's office was getting only \$87,000.

Those are figures that relate to a significant area of our parliamentary system. There has been very significant trend, an openmindedness. The Liberal Government has provided Members of this House with more tools, and all this has happened since 1968-69. So much for the funds provided for Hon. Members to better perform their duties in this Parliament, and for the Leader of the Opposition.