



RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Proposals for a New Committee System, document tabled in the Ontario Legislature by the Standing Committee on Procedural Affairs, June, 1980, 26 p.

Earlier this year, the Standing Procedural Affairs Committee under the chairmanship of Mike Breaugh tabled in the Ontario Legislature "Proposals for a New Committee System". Representing the culmination of two years work, the purpose of this report is to provoke public debate among Members in the hope and expectation that a more rational, coherent and efficient committee system might be established.

The report itself is premised on the correct assumption that the committee system is very rapidly approaching the limits to which it can expand. There is, then, a clear recognition that given the ever-increasing demands made of committee time, there is also an ever-increasing decrease in committee effectiveness. It is this inefficiency which the Procedural Affairs Committee wishes to see redressed. It is their report which they hope will be the vehicle through which substantive change might be initiated.

The recommendations themselves have been influenced by several broad principals. Notwithstanding the burdgeoning growth of Government business, the Committee recognizes that while committees have no mandate to govern, they are effective vehicles for detailed study and specialized debate and, by such activities as providing for expert testimony, enable Members the opportunity to develop and reinforce specialized policy interests. The key principle is the recognition, as enunciated by the Federal Conservative posi-

tion paper on Parliamentary Reform, that: "Parliamentarians should be able to effectively put the question 'why' and 'why not'". In other words, by providing for increased surveillance of the Executive, the Breaugh Report intimates that government itself would become more open, more accountable and more receptive to the needs of its citizenry.

Certainly, the proposed recommendations, if implemented, would go some distance in realizing this aim. In short, the Report calls for reducing the size of committees; eliminating the present practice of substituting at will; creating new committees to handle Public as well as Private Bills and making greater use of sub-committees; increasing the surveillance of the manner in which the Estimates are handled; referring, as a matter of course, the Annual Reports of all ministries and agencies to the appropriate committees; incorporating terms of reference into the Standing Orders; reducing the redundancy in, and increasing the accountability of, government agencies; and providing more support staff for both committees and the Private Member. In other words, the Procedural Affairs Committee wishes to create the climate necessary to return to the legislature the many powers it traditionally held and restore to the Members the latitude to enable them to effectively enable them to discharge their duties and responsibilities.

Ontario is, of course, by no means alone in its search for an improved committee system. It is, then, to be expected that many of these recommendations follow closely upon those enunciated elsewhere at both the provincial and federal level: in the Camp Commission,

the Morrow Committee, the Business Council on National Issues and Lambert Reports, the P.C. White Paper on Parliamentary Reform, the work done in 1975-6 by the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization and so on. It is, however, somewhat unfortunate that the scope of the recommendations of the Breaugh Committee do not go quite as far as one might wish. It would perhaps be too idealistic to expect a government to stipulate which legislative measures are ones on which its continued existence depends. By the same criterion, however, a committee should be empowered to recommend a reduction of an item of expenditures without inferring a non-confidence in the government. Similarly, Government should be obliged to implement recommendations of a committee or commission and, if not, provide reasons for not doing so.

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Committees in Legislatures: A Comparative Analysis by John D. Lees and Malcolm Shaw, Duke University Press, 1979, 449 p.

Good books often provoke stimulating questions. Sadly, *Committees in Legislatures* prompts one basic question: why was such an outdated book published?

The book stems from conferences held in 1969 and 1971, and it is evident that the papers have seen little, if any, revision since then. Now it is unfair to expect a book published in 1979 to