

*The Address—Mr. Winch*

that in this session we are going to be swamped with a series of white papers. Although I agree with this, as I said a few moments ago a white paper is really a fait accompli as far as decisions of government, policy-making and the introduction of legislation are concerned.

Both opposition and government members have a responsibility to ascertain whether any decision, policy or legislation put forward by the government is the correct one. It is most difficult to arrive at a conclusion in this regard when all one has before one is a white paper. The government has behind it all of the reports made by departmental and inter-departmental committees, as well as the reports of various task forces.

I think that both the government and parliament would be far more responsible if there were made available, as far as practicable, in addition to government white papers, the reports upon which the government has reached decisions. Because it is possible, Mr. Speaker, for the government to reach a wrong decision on the evidence submitted. The government may be making a decision or formulating a policy that is based on party and political expediency instead of on the information supplied.

I fully realize that there are undoubtedly some documents that must be treated as completely confidential; that fact I recognize. Nevertheless, I hope that the Prime Minister will seriously consider making it government policy that members of all parties be allowed to receive the basic information upon which the government has reached a particular conclusion. If such a course were followed, parliamentary democracy would have a truer meaning.

Having said that white papers were really a fait accompli, may I in all sincerity make a suggestion to the government? I agree with the government's policy of placing a greater workload on, and giving greater responsibilities to, our committees. I think that is a good move. However, Mr. Speaker, I say it is sheer nonsense and a waste of the taxpayers' money to give terms of reference to a committee and ask the committee to make recommendations thereon when in fact the government has already made up its mind what it is going to do. Such a course is absolute hypocrisy, and it happens far too often.

Let me give the house a couple of illustrations. I have the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on External

Affairs and National Defence. This committee received terms of reference from the government which included a study of NATO policy. The committee spent months studying NATO policy because the government wanted a decision. At great expense, every member of that committee was sent overseas to visit numerous countries in about 14 days. Within one day of returning to Ottawa the committee had to write its report. Yet the government had already made up its mind what it was going to do about NATO and what our NATO policy was to be. I ask, why waste weeks and weeks of many members' time and thousands of dollars in expenses if the government had already made up its mind?

Even more ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference also included a study of maritime command, its existing structure and policies. The committee was asked to look to the future and to bring in a report. During the recess a sub-committee of the standing committee returned to Ottawa, travelled to Halifax, spent four days there, received a mountain of information about maritime command and policy, A.S.W. and so on. Yet, within half an hour of the committee's return to Ottawa the government announced its maritime command policy over the radio and this included the scrapping, sale or mothballing of our only aircraft carrier, *Bonaventure*.

This sort of thing makes a farce of our committees and illustrates the arrogance and stupidity of the government in connection with some phases of committee work. I believe in the committee structure, in increasing the workload of committees and in the acceptance of new responsibilities; but let not the committees be the government's vehicle for face saving and whitewashing. If the government has made up its mind about a certain policy, then let it have the guts to say so, because the members of the House of Commons have plenty of other work to do.

● (3:10 p.m.)

A great deal has been said about the government's austerity program under which in the next year our Civil Service is to be cut by some 25,000. I should like to express the hope that this policy is not static and there can be some variation. If there is not, some rather ridiculous situations can and will develop. I understand the rule is that if a position becomes vacant, an employee resigns or is fired, that position cannot be filled. Let me give you an illustration of what not only can occur but is occurring.

On the Atlantic coast we have a fisheries headquarters. They have two large ships, one