

Transport and Communications

of this, Mr. Speaker, we are now seeing the emasculation of a Committee report that the government does not like.

Mr. Allmand: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Benjamin: Certainly.

Mr. Allmand: Is the hon. member saying that as a backbencher, as a member of parliament, he automatically accepts any report made by a parliamentary committee and that he would not try to amend such report?

Mr. Benjamin: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to my fellow M.P.'s who are in the backbenches on both sides of the house that they are now being party to destroying the very thing they wanted, the stronger and better functioning of committees, and the stronger and better functioning of members of parliament. We have over 100 new boys, so to speak, in this house. Most of them are on the government side. All of us new boys have to rely on the majority of those on the government side doing the most of the ball carrying with regard to the better functioning of parliament and its committees. May I say to my fellow M.P.'s who sit in the back two rows on the government side that, as a result of the amendment moved today, this is their last chance. They have a few hours in which to proceed behind the curtain, or whatever method they choose to use, to persuade the government house leader and those on the treasury benches not to do this.

● (5:40 p.m.)

Mr. McGrath: Only the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) has been trying to defend them.

Mr. Benjamin: I think even the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) would like to do this. I want him to know that, quite apart from party considerations, he would have the blessing of members of all parties in this house were he to do this, or at least try. I make the same request of other members on the government side who sit in the back two rows.

There is nothing in the recommendations in the committee report which makes the adoption of them by the government mandatory if the report is adopted. There is nothing that says the government is compelled to implement those recommendations. I have never yet heard of a recommendation that automatically carried with it a provision for its implementation. Surely, a recommendation is

[Mr. Benjamin.]

not mandatory. Surely, because this is so, parliamentary committees are able to act more freely and more vigorously, and sometimes even a little independently, without worrying about causing embarrassment to the government of the day, no matter what its political stripe.

Surely, the adoption or rejection of this report by parliament is perfectly possible, without bringing into the question the kind of amendment we have before us. This amendment is not necessary; it emasculates parliament and prevents happening what all of us want to see happen in this and succeeding parliaments. But the government chooses to take these recommendations as mandatory instructions. Why they choose to do this I cannot for the life of me understand.

Therefore, the government would use its majority to get the kind of report it wants. Then, why bother with committees? The government could do this equally well without them. The government could have task forces, cabinet committees, or even groups of its own backbenchers, meet and bring in reports and reports and reports; it would not be necessary to go through this exercise in standing committees.

I plead with my colleagues on the back two rows of the government side of the house not to let this happen. This is their last chance. I ask them to do all they can in this respect; to at least try and prevent this happening. I ask them to show that they are trying. If they do not succeed, so what! They will be better men for trying. They should at least try, for if they don't try, they go back to becoming supine ciphers whose only role amounts to being and doing as they are told; and when the government house leader says "Jump", the only thing they can ask is "How high?" There is more to this question than just what is contained in the report of the transport committee.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Benjamin: Certainly.

Mr. Allmand: The hon. member says that all we, as backbenchers, on this side, do, is jump when the government says "Jump" and vote when they say "Vote". I would like to ask how many times the hon. member has voted against the instructions of his party.

Mr. Lewis: That is a really intelligent question!