

Transport and Communications

round the country if their recommendations are to be tossed aside at the whim of the government. An example is the report of this committee. The government was well aware that this committee was in the Atlantic provinces and would be presenting a report on its return. Before the committee had an opportunity to submit its report, the government made its decision regarding the Prince Edward Island causeway. They did not consider any recommendations the committee would have in that regard.

An hon. Member: They did not have to.

Mr. Nesbitt: An hon. member said they did not have to. Of course not. The government is omnipotent and all-powerful. When the government sends a committee on a trip it does not have the courtesy to wait for the committee to return before making decisions.

An hon. Member: How do you know? You were not there.

Mr. Nesbitt: The hon. member no doubt is trying to make political hay. I happen to be a member of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence and was in Europe at the time.

The substance of the report of the Transport Committee concerns the passenger service of the Newfoundland railway. I do not intend to deal with the substance. Others of my colleagues will do so in more detail and at greater length.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is a cheerful prospect.

Mr. Nesbitt: It may be cheerful for some and not so cheerful for others. The government is never obliged to accept the recommendations of any committee. When we are starting out with a new set of rules, powers and authority for committees I feel the government should bend over backwards in trying to accept and follow these reports. If the government had certain views on a matter being studied by the committee it could have made formal representations to members of the committee, which would have avoided all this trouble.

It is quite clear that the lines of communication between the cabinet and the Canadian Transport Commission have somehow got fouled up. If the government had made its views known to members of the committee, some compromise arrangement could have been worked out. I am in no way attaching any blame to the chairman. It is quite obvious he is not to blame. Had the government

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

attempted to transmit its views, this waste of time in the house could have been avoided.

As I mentioned before, very sincere and hard work has been done by the chairman and members of the Transport Committee. The same applies to other committees of which I have knowledge. This new work is being carried out by the committees at a very great cost to the taxpayers. The government should keep itself better informed of what is going on in the committees.

It is quite clear the cat is now out of the bag. It is not a very nice cat. It is a big, scruffy alley cat. The alley cat I refer to is the government's intention to toss aside committee reports without inquiring what the committee is doing. If this is going to continue, members of this house will be perfectly justified in feeling that their work on committees is a waste of time.

The government should not toss aside committee reports without taking the trouble to find out what is going on. Many weeks of hard work have been put into these reports and the taxpayers' money is being spent so that the members of these committees can travel. Most of us could be better employed looking after our correspondence and doing other work in the house. If this kind of thing continues, I see very little hope for the committee system. Government members can take what they wish out of this, but to say that if it continues a great many members may feel it will be a waste of time to go to committee meetings. I hope the government will bear these observations in mind, pull up its socks, and make the committee system work a little better.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, I must first refer to the opening remarks of the government house leader when he said that he had not interfered previously in the work of any committee. As has been mentioned by the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt), he did interfere on a previous occasion in the house when a question was put to him, as recorded at page 3587 of *Hansard* for December 6, 1968, when he said:

I have not studied this; I am advised that the resolution was passed but that it was out of order.

I have been around long enough in public life at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to know what interference means, and that was interference. In the present case we