

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

CONCURRENCE IN FIFTH REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

The house resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Lessard (LaSalle) that the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, presented to the house on Wednesday, March 19, 1969, be concurred in, and the amendment of Mr. Allmand.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I attended only two meetings as a member of the transport committee, serving only to replace one of my colleagues. I am not going to dwell at any length on the merits or demerits of the case of the "Newfie Bullet", but I rise to take part in the debate because of what seems to be happening to this parliament and its standing committees.

The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) who has moved this sub-amendment, amendment, or whatever it is, gave as one reason for moving it that he thought it was a bad report. He is fully entitled to that opinion. Colleagues in his own party may disagree with him on that point, and certainly members of the committee from other parties would disagree with him, but he is fully entitled to that opinion.

However, he said during the course of his reasoning in presenting the amendment, and in explaining why he thought it was a bad report, that one or two members of the committee on the government side were unable to be present when the report was prepared, and therefore the report was bad. That does not seem to me a relevant or sufficient reason to warrant the course of action now proposed.

The hon. member advised that he could not be present because he was in Europe with the external affairs committee, and that in itself was perfectly proper. However, it seems to me the hon. member had two choices. He could have been replaced on the transport committee by a colleague, though he may not have felt that a good course to take because his colleague would not have had the benefit of the trip to the maritimes. His other option was to be replaced on the external affairs committee. I realize this matter is extremely important to him, important enough for him to forgo a trip to Europe. In that event, he would have been present and party to all of the discussions that led to the drafting and

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preparation of this report. It seems to me that the question of who was there and who was not there is not really germane to this debate. The committee met properly with a quorum and unanimously voted for the report. Therefore, I submit that whether one or more members of the committee happened to be absent when the report was prepared is not a relevant point.

The trouble with this amendment now before the house is that if it carries it amends a report that was made outside the house, and in consequence the committee need not meet again. Prior to last June 25 I was one of those so-called younger members—even though I have lost my hair—who had dreams and ideals about what parliament could grow to be. I felt that it could be something better than it was, that even though it had done fairly well in the past it could do somewhat better. I was one of those who waxed loud and long, something I suppose of which I can be accused here. Nevertheless, I was one of the hundreds who ran for office as a member of parliament. Among that number there was the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), many of those who now sit in the back two rows on the government side, and certainly those who sit in the back two rows of the party of which I happen to be a member.

We were told that parliament would be made to function better, more efficiently and more quickly; that committees would be given more responsibilities, made more relevant and important; that committees would have a larger role to play in parliament and thus ordinary members of parliament would have a larger role to play; that backbenchers would be more independent of the civil service, bureaucracy and the treasury benches; that backbenchers would be able in the course of carrying out their duties more properly to represent the views of their constituents, as well as their own views, in the standing committees of this parliament. I readily agree that often it is almost impossible for backbenchers to express their private views in this chamber without causing some embarrassment to members of their own party. However, they are more free to express their own views in the standing committees and in the reports of the standing committees, in the preparation of which they take part.

We then had the debate on the rules changes, and with the exception of the proposed rule 16A, with which we disagreed, all members spoke at length about what they felt parliament should become. Yet after all