

Transport and Communications

and let there be no suggestion that the committees are mere objects of executive direction, as we saw attempted to be carried out today.

This, Mr. Speaker, is not a very good day for those who love parliamentary government. We have an item before the house, the report of a committee—an emanation of the house—and the chairman of the committee retains his seat. The house leader on behalf of the executive stands and moves a motion which is nothing but a rebuke to that committee, an emanation of this honourable house. That is an indication of the views of the government on the role of the committee, and indeed on the role of any committee.

As my colleague, the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt), pointed out, the committee very carefully kept within its jurisdiction and recommended a course of action. But in the eyes of the house leader of the government party it was not allowed to do any such thing. Have we reached the stage where a standing committee of this House of Commons would dare not recommend a policy for consideration which accords not with the views of the executive, of the government? Can a committee not bring in a suggestion which is displeasing to the government?

Do we now tonight vote that a committee be instructed to bring in a recommendation in accordance with the views of the executive? Surely, this is not the situation. Are we going to vote that the committee be instructed to do so and so? Is there to be a directive to them? What a term of reference for a committee; what a role for a committee, for a committee which was going to make parliament so effective, so efficient, to bring in the fresh air of functioning participatory democracy. Do we say to them, "This you must do, this you must recommend and no other."

I ask this question and it is not a rhetorical question: when the committee meets, if it decides not to follow the diktat of the house leader, what then? Surely, a group of men, members of this house, have a right to vote yes or no? Surely they can decide to approve or not approve of the directive given by the house leader?

What will happen if they should say no? And it is conceivable under certain circumstances, of attendance or otherwise, that they might say no. Then, what happens to our system of committees? Could a committee say no under these circumstances?

If the house votes as the house leader in his Mark III edition would have it and direct it,

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

and if this committee cannot, may any committee at any time ever recommend anything which it knows that the executive would dislike? We are treading towards a very dangerous precedent, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps at a later stage the empiric judgment of committee members might be not only that they dare not recommend something that they know that the executive dislikes, but they might demur from recommending anything that they think the executive dislikes. Then how efficacious is the committee system? There is great danger in the suggestion so brazenly put forward tonight.

Someone mentioned the hon. member for York East (Mr. Otto). I wish he were here because he could tell things that I do not know. I do not go to committees instructed. I don't belong to a monolithic party, and I don't want to. I will never belong to a monolithic party; I will stay in my own party.

This is a most serious situation, Mr. Speaker. I am saddened because, as I said a few minutes ago, I did disagree with some of my colleagues. I thought the committee system would be practical, useful, sensible. Perhaps it was a mistake on my part. Perhaps it represents a triumph of hope over experience. I have been here over a decade and I thought that behind all this there was good will, that there was regard for the parliamentary system. I suppose it only proves, Mr. Speaker, that I am not really as old as I look, and I have been told this many, many times.

I do not want to monopolize too much time because I know many members want to talk about this fundamental issue.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear,

● (8:30 p.m.)

Mr. Macquarrie: I appreciate the courtesy of that. Some people talk with their seats and some with their hands. Occasionally, some use their minds, but if the letter of the spirit of the diktat—and I use that word again—is carried out tonight, standing committees of this house will be bereft of power, of will, of influence. They will be denigrated; they will become a mere chimera without influence and without value. This I do not want to see. This is not a great day for parliament; it is not a great day for the house leader of the government party. I am sorry he is not here tonight. There will be many things said about that hon. gentleman, but I think he will never be described as a House of Commons man. When I heard the house leader of the government