

Transport and Communications

country, but I will not tolerate the whole system of government going by the wayside because of the insubordinate, arrogant, ballyragging attitude of the house leader and some of his cohorts who toe a very doubtful political line.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): In recent weeks I have come to the conclusion that this particular standing committee has, in some strange way, become the proving ground of the decline in the hopes of those who thought the committee system under the new rules would be good and helpful to this parliament. Here, I am unlike my colleague from Oxford.

I did at one time think the development of greater significance and importance in committees would help the efficiency and functions of this parliament. I may say I have grave doubts about my earlier views after listening to what has gone on today and after noting with pained attention what has happened to many of the recommendations and actions of this particular committee in recent weeks.

Time after time there are occurrences which prompt even the most kindly of us to ask disquieting questions. Why has this particular committee come to be regarded as a transgressor? Has it erred grievously in some way that it should be singled out, not for a runaround, but a kickaround? Would it be because through the vigilance, persuasiveness and alertness of Newfoundland members on the committee and the perception and broad-mindedness of committee members from other provinces and other parties that they came out with points of view which were somewhat inimical to certain members of the treasury board? I wonder about that.

● (8:20 p.m.)

I had expected this afternoon that the hon. member for LaSalle (Mr. Lessard) would lead off the discussion. I, too, know that he is a very able chairman, a sound and reasonable man. I have had the honour and privilege of sitting with him in this house for a good many years. I think highly of his judgment and of his motivations. No, I do not think it is 20 years as the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) mentioned, but it is quite a while. As you approach the 50 year mark, the years seem to be more heavy, but it is quite a while since the hon. member and I were first colleagues together.

I was not a member of the Transport and Communications Committee, but I did see it

in action when it visited Charlottetown. I heard the briefs which were presented by many important bodies from the province of Prince Edward Island, and many distinguished and concerned citizens. I heard the views and the discussions on the important and grave transportation problems of that province. I thought that the committee was impressed by the briefs which it had heard and I know, because I know Charlottetown, that the petitioners and others were favourably impressed by the committee, especially by the studious impartiality and the obvious concern of the distinguished chairman.

But what happened? On the very most important question concerning the province of Prince Edward Island, one of the most important in the region, the committee did not get time to get back to Ottawa to sort out all it had heard at Charlottetown, to blend together the contributions of its various distinguished members, before the government announced to Prince Edward Island, to Canada and to this house that that which they had solemnly promised to another government in Canada, namely, the government of Prince Edward Island, would not in fact be delivered. So, the people of Charlottetown although they enjoyed seeing the members of the committee, for all intents and purposes, and for all practical purposes might have saved their breath, their ink, their paper and their time.

Mr. McGrath: The government made a fool of the P.E.I. government.

Mr. Macquarrie: The government put the chop to the Northumberland causeway without bothering to hear what the committee recommended as a result of its on the spot investigation. It was a thorough investigation by some very able men, and I was proud in my native province to claim them as my colleagues, regardless of their party labels.

This, Mr. Speaker, was contemptuous; it was callous; it was degrading. But apart from what happened to the P.E.I. causeway, that is not the issue here, Mr. Speaker. What is even more important is what has happened to the committee system. The committees are an emanation of this house; they are creatures of this house; they are part of this house. They are all of these. Surely, we have not reached the stage where responsible government is merely a chimera of the past. The executive itself rests upon the confidence of parliament, the same body which creates the committees,