

AFTERTHOUGHTS

In a number of ways the operation of the Special Committee on Alternative Energy and Oil Substitution has represented a departure from normal Committee operation. This is also true for the other five Task Forces established at the same time but, to our knowledge, no Canadian Parliamentary Committee has ever before been given such a technically demanding subject for investigation. This led to an unprecedented commitment of professional support to a Committee by the Library of Parliament. In another departure, the research staff was allowed to participate regularly in questioning during public hearings and during visits to other countries. Upon occasion, the staff also was given the opportunity to represent the Committee when Members themselves were unavailable. Given the technical nature of the mandate, the rapport these new developments engendered between Committee members and staff allowed for a broad and detailed exploration of energy issues.

As elected representatives, Parliamentarians are entrusted with managing the public's affairs. This has never been an easy task, but recently it has become even more difficult as society is faced with increasingly complex and technical issues, not the least of which is how to deal with energy matters. Thus if Members of Parliament are to handle their legislative responsibilities effectively, especially with regard to technical matters, some new approach to help cope with this complexity must be considered.

We have found that the vehicle of a "Special Committee" has been an effective means of developing the expertise of Members in new fields. And to the extent that this style of committee operation allows Members to educate themselves in specialized areas, it also serves to expand Parliament's body of knowledge. This is because a Special Committee allows a small group of Members to study a subject in more detail than has typically been possible under the Standing Committee system. We found that a committee membership of seven was almost ideal for our purposes.

Beyond the fact that seven Members of Parliament have been given a unique opportunity to develop their thinking on the subject of alternative energy, our Parliamentary system benefits in another way. The knowledge garnered by the Committee's research staff also remains at the service of Parliament since that staff was drawn from the precincts of the Hill. This facilitates the transmission of new information to other Members.

We regard the establishment and operation of the Special Committees as an important test by the Government in strengthening the Committee system. We believe that our experience with a small specialized committee points the way to dealing with many of the complex issues facing Parliament today and promises to provide Members with more resources for and confidence in approaching such matters. We recommend that the Government consider building upon the experience of these Task Forces with a view to incorporating some features of their operation into the regular Committee system.