

Government Orders

elected members and it is a very distressing trend and a very distressing and disturbing pattern.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Caccia: We on this side of the House do not believe there is a bankruptcy of ideas on the part of elected representatives. But the proposed changes are evidently a reflection on the government's assessment of its own capacity to produce that type of leadership through its own members. In that sense it is a very serious indictment.

Let me analyse for a moment the idea of having members in their riding longer every month, i.e., for one week. This scheme is one that could be described as the steam-engine era scheme, coming from the time when travel was very slow and electronic facilities of the kind we know today did not exist. Fifty years ago, it took two or three days to reach one's riding. You certainly did not have a fax in your office or the telephone facilities and other ways of communicating quickly with your electors, constituents and the like. Neither did you have the capacity to travel back and forth by jet.

So we have a package that seems to be conceived and developed with a steam-engine era in mind during the time of the jet engine and of the electronic era. Mr. Speaker, one wonders, therefore, what kind of historical context this government has in mind when it proposes this kind of parliamentary reform. Has it packaged the product of the 1990s for our consideration? Or is it a product of the 1920s?

Inevitably, even with the highest degree of charity we are capable of receiving from the opposition side sometimes, we have to conclude that this government is using a thought process in advancing these proposals that belongs to the steam-engine era rather than to the jet-engine era in which we live today.

Therefore, something is discordant, anachronistic, and out of sync, to put it in very simple terms.

A new system of committees, the so-called five envelopes, deserves a moment of attention, Mr. Speaker. One can understand that the government would want to re-organize committees in a manner that is more rational and reflects new values and new political policy priorities.

In that sense, I would applaud the government for having attempted to do so, but one aspect in that new scheme must be criticized and I hope the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment will perhaps take it into account; namely, the manner in which the envelope, which now comes under the heading of natural resources, has been conceived. Because you find the environment as a servant to natural resources in that envelope.

I or you or everyone would have thought, and even the parliamentary secretary, that environment would have perhaps been the heading of that envelope, under which all those natural resources would then have come.

Considering the far-reaching statements and declarations the Prime Minister of Canada has made on the environment, sustainable development, and other matters at home and abroad over the last six years, we do not see a carrying-through of the declarations that have been made in abstract terms, which do not find practical expression in the new committee organization. In other words, the environment is relegated to being just another horse, in competition with other interests, rather than being the over-all envelope that takes under its wings, so to speak, the various natural resources considered under that particular envelope.

I would suggest to you, in conclusion, the following thought. It seems to me that when we are elected we campaign and people vote to send their member to Ottawa. That is the idea on which an election is run to find who people will send to Ottawa. The package that is before us for debate and for a vote today does not contain proposals that would increase our accountability through the House of Commons, that would increase our parliamentary effectiveness in this Chamber, or that increase our effectiveness as legislators and our legislative role in committees. Unfortunately, the package seems to weaken these three specific roles. Therefore, the proposals will weaken us individually and collectively with respect to our electors and to the public interest, which we are supposed to protect, promote and enhance on behalf of our electors.

Secondly, as a corollary to that observation, I submit to you that Canadians expect or would expect a different kind of reform at this time in history. One that would turn us into better parliamentarians rather than political campaigners in our respective ridings, that would im-