

Honourable senators will also remember that the order of reference contained an obligation for the committee to submit an interim report on Canada's participation in research on the Strategic Defence Initiative and on Bilateral Trade with the United States no later than August 23, 1985.

In the other place, the opposition had demanded that the government refrain from making a decision on these two questions until the committee had been able to hear witnesses on these two subjects. As a result, the committee had to start its hearings rather precipitously, owing to the time frame agreed upon by the parties in the other place for submission of the interim report on these two questions. The committee was therefore not in a position to prepare a very long study. After all, it had only seven weeks, including the time required to prepare the report.

The committee had to sit this summer and visited six cities representative of Canada's various regions. Unfortunately, some provinces had to be left out, including Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The committee held its hearings in Halifax, Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver.

Many witnesses appeared before the committee at all these locations. It was a novel experience to have the public invited to appear before a parliamentary committee, to express its views on a matter of international policy. It was an interesting though exhausting experience. In some cases, the committee had to sit from nine o'clock in the morning until past midnight. It was necessary to limit witnesses and testimony, because of lack of time. The committee was working under constant pressure.

Finally we produced the report on time, and it has been given adequate publicity. I do not intend to go into the details of the recommendations it contains. I point out that it is a fairly long report, considering how little time the committee had to draft it.

The foreword was written by one of the committee members, Senator Doyle. He was commended for his attendance, and I want to express my appreciation in that respect.

Recommendations were made on two subjects. In the case of bilateral trade with the United States, the committee produced a unanimous report. At least there was no statement of dissent from the official opposition. The New Democratic Party did express certain reservations. As to the issue of Strategic Defence Initiative, there was dissidence as we all know.

I should like to read the conclusion of the summary resolution:

The majority of the committee, including those who were inclined to say no and those who were inclined to say yes, agreed, however, that the committee was not able to obtain crucial information at this time because the material is classified or otherwise unavailable. This might influence a final decision, and the majority of the committee feels that the government is best equipped to gather the additional information required. Therefore the majority of the committee recommends that the government not

take a final decision on participation in the research phase of the SDI until it has been able to acquire the required additional information related to the strategic, financial and economic implications of the invitation.

I indicated that the Liberals and New Democrats stated their dissent on this issue. Their statements can be found at the end of the committee report. The Progressive Conservative members of the committee agreed to give the two opposition parties an opportunity to express briefly their dissent, and those statements appear in Appendices F and G of the report.

The summary resolution of the majority indicates that the Progressive Conservative members of the committee were not unanimous. They were divided. There is no secret about that. Some were inclined to accept the invitation, and others no. Where reasons were concerned, there were all shades of opinion, not only within that majority, but also among dissidents.

It remains that dissidents, ironically, were known even before the committee started working. The Liberal Party had set up a task force, which heard witnesses. It came to the conclusion through Mr. Chrétien, that that party did not favour accepting the American invitation.

The New Democrats had said the same thing. Indeed, having already opposed NATO membership, they had logically stated their opposition to any SDI participation.

Liberal dissidence is not very clear. The report and later events show that in that group also various views were held.

When Senator Gigantès gave notice of an inquiry indicating that he wanted to discuss the SDI question, I told myself: Why all that rush? There will eventually have to be a debate on the matter anyway, because I myself had already given prior notice of that inquiry. Later on, I realized his move was an excellent one. It allowed him to express the view he had already expressed even before the committee started discussing the matter, and this view he published in newspapers before leaving the committee. The speech he made the other day is almost to the letter the text he had published in the papers. On the other hand, his inquiry allowed Senators Steuart, Hicks and Godfrey to express their views, which are different from those of Senator Gigantès. As regards Senators Steuart and Hicks, both agreed to simply accept the invitation. Senator Godfrey agreed with the decision made by the government on September 7, 1985. That decision, as honourable members are aware, declines the invitation, while pointing out that Canada does not disagree with the American initiative, in as much as research is and remains the responsibility of the United States. Canada said, in particular, that it felt the decision was a wise one in view of the fact that the Soviet Union no doubt is already doing research for such a space deterrent.

● (1510)

Considering the differences of opinion in the general public, in the government party, and in the official opposition, the government's decision is quite logical in my view. Practically speaking, I believe it was the only one the government could make, given the circumstances, to decline the invitation