

Government Orders

Again with respect to committees, I think part of what is happening here is that the government has had a hard time maintaining its membership on committees, that many times the government side is drastically under-represented on committees. I think one of the reasons for that, and this affects not just government members but everybody, is that the high expectations of the 1985 McGrath committee report that these new committees, founded on these new rules, would be listened to have foundered.

I look at the hon. member for Annapolis Valley-Hants and I remember when he was the chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport. When the Standing Committee on Transport unanimously recommended against the VIA cuts, they might as well have jumped off the Peace Tower because nobody paid any attention to the unanimous recommendation of a long-standing, well respected committee.

An hon. member: Was it the whole committee?

Mr. Blaikie: The whole committee recommended against the VIA cuts and the government paid no attention.

A committee unanimously recommended certain things with respect to food irradiation and the minister of health at the time, now the minister of energy, ignored them. The list goes on of times when committees felt that they were going to make a difference, and they made no difference.

The government does not pay any attention to what is going on in committees, unless it happens to expect that it is going to agree with it. I sat on the Standing Committee on External Affairs. We went to the Soviet Union and the Germanys, now Germany. We made a report with certain recommendations with respect to Canada's activity in NATO, et cetera. Several months after the report came out I met Canada's Ambassador to NATO. I said: "What did you think of our report"? He said: "What report?" He asked "What report" because there is no will on the part of the government or in any government department to take seriously the work of committees. Yet the very best work that goes on here often goes on in committee, as members have said, and they are not just blowing their own horns. A lot of good work does go on in committee.

That work does not seem to have any effect. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because more and more of the political process is captive to a smaller and smaller group of people

who are advisers to the Prime Minister: the Prime Minister's pollster, the Prime Minister's image maker, the Prime Minister's adviser on this and that. We in effect have what Canadians are coming to realize and what I myself am coming to realize very reluctantly, a kind of four-year elected dictatorship of a very small number of people, and the rest of us here are just froth. We are just sort of icing on the cake. We just keep up the appearance of democracy until the next election.

An hon. member: That is right. That is the way it is.

Mr. Blaikie: We are all being used in that way to varying degrees whether we like it or not because the real decisions are being made somewhere else. They are not just being made in the Prime Minister's Office. Some of the decisions that affect what goes on in the Prime Minister's Office are being made in the corporate boardrooms of the country.

That is part of the over-all malaise it seems to me. I do not know the answer short of a general rebellion on the part of the people by which they demand authentic political processes, an authentic political debate and an authentic Parliament. I think that is the kind of alienation and anger on which new political phenomena like the Reform Party feed. I do not think that they are the answer, but they certainly feed on a legitimate anger about that.

Mr. Speaker, I see you giving me the high sign or the low sign, I am not sure. I could certainly go on about this. I think I have said why I think this reform goes against what we had in mind in the McGrath committee. I think there are members on the government side who at least must feel ambiguous about these reforms and see the argument I am making, even if they cannot agree with me.

I would hope that very soon we would get around to dealing with some of the really tough questions which the Lefebvre committee ignored, which the McGrath committee ignored and which this reform ignores and that is, how to deal with Question Period to make it more substantive and make it an opportunity for more members rather than fewer and fewer members. That is part of the problem around here. If you can never get on in the only forum that anyone ever pays attention to, then what is the point of being here? If no one is paying attention to debates and Question Period is the only place that anyone pays attention to, and fewer and fewer