

*Government Orders*

• (1200)

I preface my speech this morning with this general overview on confidence and the fact that we are not really a legislative body of government any longer but strictly a rubber stamp. We are in the midst of change in this country. Whether we like it or not this country is changing radically. At this point in time we do not even know with any degree of certainty whether we are going to have a country in two years' time that includes, for example, the province of Quebec. We do not know if Quebec secedes whether we are going to be part of the west, or whether the maritimes are going to remain within the old Dominion, as it was once called, or the Commonwealth.

Mr. Speaker, this change obviously is coming to the House of Commons as well. Members of Parliament are feeling more and more frustrated. I notice a malaise in this Chamber every day. Next month I celebrate my twentieth anniversary in this House.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Blackburn (Brant):** Thank you very kindly. I was elected on May 31, 1971 in a by-election. My opponents back home said: "Oh, well, by-elections are by-elections; you win one and when the general election comes along you will be defeated". I don't know why I have been re-elected so many times, but I know I am not the only one in this Chamber to experience this.

I have been here long enough to know that when I sense this malaise developing in this House—that has been here for several years in fact—one of the reasons for it is because we do not feel as though we are part of a legitimate legislative process. We do not write laws. We are not directly responsible to our constituents for the laws that we vote for or against in this Chamber. When was the last time anyone wrote a bill on this side of the House, or a backbencher on the other side of the House, that actually became the law of the land?

Members say: "Oh, well, committees have been reformed, you can go to committees". What are committees? Committees are just a reflection of this Chamber. Why does the government find it so difficult to maintain its membership in committees on a day to day basis, and therefore wants more time off? It is not so much that members would rather spend their time in their constituencies—certainly that is one reason—but the other reason, I am convinced, because I feel it on this side of the House, is a sense of uselessness. It is a sense

that you can produce the best report that committee has ever produced, and all it does is gather dust on the shelf.

It is not just the fault of this government. I have seen it with many governments. In all likelihood it would happen—I am quite quite sure it would happen—if my party was in power at this time under our present rules.

The first point I want to make is that I do not like the idea of the executive branch being part of the legislative branch. I think it should be separate. It should be appointed by a Prime Minister who is directly elected by the people. Cabinet should be responsible to him and not to the House. Its duties and responsibilities should be limited, as in the States, as in France, as in West Germany or Germany as it is now called, to simply writing policy and giving policy directions for the legislative branch to legislate for. We should be the framers of bills in this House, and that should be our only job.

Well, how do we do it? It should be done in committees. Committees, should draft bills, or subcommittees of committees should be the real drafters. That is where lobbyists will be heard, that is where technocrats will be heard; that is where individual Canadians and the groups they represent, powerful and less powerful, will be heard. They come to the subcommittees and present their briefs on a given policy. From there, the subcommittee, with its drafters, drafts a bill. The bill then goes to the full committee which examines that bill thoroughly—and I mean thoroughly. That is where the work is done.

Then the bill is presented to the House by the chair of that committee and the subcommittee, the two chairs.

Then we debate the merits. Throw the whips out. They are not needed. Are we not intelligent enough to know after several months of intense scrutiny whether a bill is a good bill for our constituents, for the constituents in Newfoundland as well as northern Ontario, the interior of B.C.? Do we not know as well as the technocrats who draft the bills now whether those bills are going to be accepted?

In a democracy, as I understand it, we should not be telling the people what we think is good for them based on the expertise on the treasury benches and their executive assistants and their deputy ministers and all the other experts. The people of this country should be telling us what they think is good for them. We should be, after listening to them, drafting the legislation and debating it here in this House, not with the threat of confidence hanging over us, that some political party's