

*Transport and Communications*

issues now facing us are not just those covered in the substance of the report, namely, matters having to do with transportation problems in the Atlantic provinces; those issues have been surpassed by the simple question whether members of parliament when they serve on committees are free to vote as they wish, or whether they must vote in the one and only way they have been told they must vote.

**An hon. Member:** That has not yet been decided.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** The hon. member says that has not yet been decided. I hope it will not be decided. But if the amendment moved by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) is carried, and if the motion as amended is carried, this house will be saying to its members on the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications that there is only one way in which those members can vote on a certain issue. I think this is a very serious matter, and I hope the house will think very deeply about it before it votes on the question.

I had something to say yesterday about the committee system. That was when we were debating a point of order. I have long felt that we should upgrade our committees and I am pleased with the changes we have made in our rules looking toward that end. I am pleased also that we, if I may say so, are considering in our Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization other things that we may yet do to upgrade the work of our committees. I believe the day will come when we may even have another building especially for committees, when there may be times that the house does not sit because important committees of parliament are meeting. But we do not move in that direction if the first time a committee brings in a recommendation which the government does not like, that committee is slapped down, not just by a rejection of its recommendation but by an instruction that it must go back into session and vote this way, or else.

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

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** I do not know who thought up such an idea, Mr. Speaker. I thought this was a free parliament. I thought we voted as we pleased in this House of Commons and in our committees. But this apparently is not so.

**Mr. Allmand:** Mr. Speaker, could I ask the hon. member a question?

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, is it the same question the hon. member has asked other members?

**Mr. Allmand:** No.

**Mr. Woolliams:** He has changed the wording.

**Mr. Allmand:** The motion states that a certain paragraph of the report must be deleted. If that paragraph is deleted, what is to prevent the committee from bringing in another paragraph on the same problem but with different wording and with a different recommendation? Is the hon. member suggesting that because the committee is instructed to delete this paragraph, it cannot bring in another paragraph on the same subject but in a different tenor?

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I really give the hon. member credit for more procedural knowledge than that. If the motion as amended passes and this matter is referred back to the committee, so far as this issue is concerned this is its total term of reference. This is all it can do, namely, redraft the report with the offending paragraph omitted. I submit that on all counts this is nothing other than a case of straight dictation. Some of my hon. friends who have interrupted have said that we have not passed this yet. I hope we will not pass it. I would rather see this matter get into government orders and stay there for the rest of the session, than be passed, because I think it would be a black day for parliament to take this stand of saying to a committee: This is what you must do. You have no other choice. You have been given the word and you must do what you are told.

I thought when my hon. friend rose that he was going to ask the question he has asked several other hon. members, namely: Does every recommendation of a committee have to be accepted? The answer to that question is clearly no. I do not think it follows automatically that because a committee makes a recommendation, it has to be accepted by the house or the government. That is what these various bodies are for, to consider things at their various stages.

Indeed, I think it would have been procedurally correct for the government to have said today: We do not like this report. We ask the house to reject it. That would have been a bit of a slap in the face, but at least it would have been procedurally correct if the government openly and honestly had