

Inquiries of the Ministry

which we can force them to be here. As I say, I cannot deny the right of the Prime Minister to say, day after day, that a particular minister is not here, or to tell us he gave certain ministers permission to be absent, or to say he told them not to be here—and I suspect this is what the roster means. But to cite the roster as though it were a procedural sanction is not in accordance with the rules of the house.

One of the reasons I raise this point of order is that I have been here long enough to know that if any practice is followed long enough the Chair will treat it as though it were valid, and that if this practice continues unchallenged month after month it will become as officially accepted as any standing order or precedent. At the present time it is not provided for in our standing orders, it is not in our rules, it is not referred to in May or Beauséjour or Bourinot. The document referred to is merely a document supplied to hon. members through the courtesy of the President of the Privy Council, and I suggest it should not be accepted by Your Honour as having the force of procedural law.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Horner: The rooster is going to defend his roster.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Trudeau: If I were from the constituency of Crowfoot I would not have made that remark.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: Really cheap, that.

Mr. Trudeau: Which is cheaper? I will trade mine for his.

I do not mind ceasing to refer to the roster, Mr. Speaker, if that is your ruling. I would comply with such a ruling with great obedience. I would merely say now that the use of this so-called roster is meant as a convenience to hon. members, and I think it comes out from the point of order which was just made that I do not have to refer to it. I can instruct ministers which days they should be attending to business in the house, and which days they should be attending committees of cabinet. This is the way we will continue to proceed in this government, and if it is necessary not to use the word roster I will not use it. But it does seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that from a member who is always complaining about red tape and formalism this is a pretty thin point

to suggest that the rules do not permit us to employ a particular word.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: I repeat that it is merely for the convenience of the members, and it has been introduced in order to get the government and parliament working more efficiently. We have looked at the statistics of the last year, and I think on only ten of the 145 sitting days did it happen that more ministers were asked questions than the number of ministers who will be sitting in the house under this system. Therefore—

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): But that is the option of the house.

Mr. Trudeau: Of course, but we are merely trying to make this parliament and this government as efficient as possible.

Mr. Horner: Oh, oh.

Mr. Trudeau: I wonder who lost his cool that time. It stands to reason that if 28 ministers are sitting in the house, when on the yearly average perhaps only 10 or 12 will be receiving questions each day, then there can be great saving in terms of administration, in terms of the time of the ministers, and in terms of the service of the Canadian people if only 10 or 12 ministers happen to be here to answer questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to hon. members that there is not much point in going through all the arguments that were submitted at considerable length on a number of occasions during the last few weeks. I will certainly not stand in the way of hon. members who want to express views, but I might say at once that I am in sympathy with the point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Certainly a reference to a document—and I agree again with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre—that has not been officially recognized as far as the Chair and the house are concerned, cannot be considered to effect, in itself, a change in the rules. To that extent I am in full agreement with the point of order raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Jack Horner (Crowfoot): On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, before the Prime Minister began his explanation of his roster