

*Supply—Privy Council*

arrangements, five days a week the Secretary of State for External Affairs should be in the House of Commons during the question period to answer questions. We should pause and reflect on this attitude of the hon. member.

In the first place, in the state of modern diplomacy, in the state of the many responsibilities of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, it has been traditional during the government of which the hon. member was a member, during the government that preceded this one and now during the present government, that the Secretary of State for External Affairs should be absent from the House of Commons for long periods of time, not absent because of any lack of respect for the house or lack of concern about his responsibilities in the house but absent because the proper discharge of his office requires that he be absent. For example, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has just returned from participating in the general debate at the United Nations General Assembly. That has been the custom over the years. Having participated myself in a general assembly session I know of what value it is for the Secretary of State for External Affairs and for the foreign ministers of other nations to attend the general debate, to participate in it, and to have the opportunity it provides to discuss current trends in international relations with the representatives of other nations.

But the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings would not have this. He says that external affairs is the second most important portfolio and that the minister should be here come what may. I must say I would disagree with this.

**Mr. Hees:** On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I never said at any time that the Secretary of State for External Affairs should be here come what may. I obviously said that he should be here if he is in Ottawa, not at the United Nations or at some other foreign conference where of course he has to be present. All secretaries of state for external affairs have always attended these conferences and we have wanted them to attend. I simply say that if he is here in Ottawa he should be here in the House of Commons, not in his office. He cannot be here if he has official duties in New York or some other foreign capital. Don't be stupid and make a statement like that.

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

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

• (12:20 p.m.)

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** I am glad the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings has recognized—

**Mr. Hees:** Stupidity annoys me very much indeed.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** I must say to the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings that while we find that quality in him we have always found it to be charming.

**Mr. Hees:** You just do not have the knack of being funny.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** You seem to be the only one who thinks so. I think it is interesting that the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings speaks almost better from his seat than on his feet. I am glad the hon. member has clarified the situation because it was clear from his previous remarks that he insisted the minister should be in the house. I am glad that at least he has clarified his party's position from this standpoint.

There are two things about the proposal before the house which I should like to emphasize. First, we are not talking so much about the importance of individual ministers being available here during the question period as we are of the importance of having them answerable on certain days in the house for their departmental and functional responsibilities. Second this system has been in vogue in the British House of Commons at Westminster for very many years. The system we are proposing provides a much better opportunity than does the British system for the questioning of ministers. It has been suggested that this system is undemocratic and is not in the interests of effective parliamentary democracy. All I can say is that if that criticism is justified then it must apply *a fortiori* to the British system.

We feel that an appearance three times a week by a minister to answer questions on matters concerning his departmental and functional responsibilities gives a first class opportunity to members to raise questions within the limits of the minister's responsibilities.

The hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings referred to the fact that many ministers sit through entire days without being asked a question. The question this automatically raises is whether this is really the best employment of a minister's time, that is, to have a minister sit here for up to an hour, after having had to prepare for the event,