

Government Organization Act, 1970

Mr. Chairman, this is an example of the carelessness of the administration. And yet, a member should be the first to be informed of the achievements of a department in his riding. But this is not the case. When a member—and let us put aside party politics—tries to find out about the plans of a department, of officials or technocrats in his riding, he is wasting his time. He goes from one technocrat to another and standing on a two-foot thick carpet, he learns absolutely nothing!

They say that it is a departmental or interdepartmental secret, or still, they say politely: This is none of your business.

Yet, people have democratically elected the member so that he will keep in touch with the authorities concerned and, without any partisan motive, report to his constituents on the administration of the government.

I have written at least a dozen letters to the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Laing), asking him about the progress being made in the expropriation proceedings concerning the federal building in Victoriaville. I got no reply, except one from his private secretary, acknowledging receipt of mine and telling me that she would bring my inquiry to the minister's knowledge. That is the kind of control Parliament has over a department even when a member's riding is concerned. This is ridiculous.

I understand the President of the Treasury Board has valid motives and is honest, but I wish to tell him that the system is inadequate, and I am not prepared to crawl in order to create four more ministries about whose establishment, transformation or abolition we shall have nothing to say, and about which we shall never know what is going on if ever one of them developed programs for our ridings.

Mr. Chairman, this is absolutely senseless. The construction of a federal building in Victoriaville is very important to me and to my fellow citizens in Lotbinière and Victoriaville—and I say this without any partisanship. All the people of my area are shocked because we have been promised a federal building since 1952. The supplies have been voted, as one can see in the estimates. An amount of some \$697,000 was voted two years ago, but no building has been erected. I wrote to the department to know if there had been expropriations, but I got no reply. In a letter to the minister I asked how work was progressing, but I have not yet received an answer. Now, I am being asked to approve a bill seeking to create ministries of state about which Parliament will not be able to give its opinion regarding their establishment, their modification, the restriction of their powers or their abolition. Our fears are quite understandable.

That is why I reject those clauses as long as we do not get information—

[English]

The Chairman: Order, please. The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, my intervention will be quite brief. I should like to say a few words in response to representations made by the hon. member for St.

[Mr. Fortin.]

John's East and also by le député de Lotbinière. First, the hon. member for St. John's East has raised what might better be described as grievances rather than observations on the bill under study. Although perhaps the grievances were not relevant, they ought to be answered.

● (9:30 p.m.)

The hon. member objected to what he referred to as the illegal roster system. He supported the notion of illegality by quoting Standing Order 5 which calls for hon. members to attend the service of the House unless leave of absence has been given by the House. I suppose that one could conclude from this Standing Order that ministers who are not on duty in the House on a particular day are absent without permission and, consequently, are offending Standing Order 5. This kind of interpretation of Standing Order 5 would apply to very large numbers. For example, the hon. member's party would be in a state of illegality and in contravention of the rules of this House if that were the correct interpretation of the rule. I am sure the members of the committee would agree that this is not the way the rule is to be interpreted.

In so far as the roster system is concerned, it is in effect an assurance given by the Prime Minister that the ministry will be so organized that each of the ministers will attend at the question period on three of the five sitting days of a week. The roster system is not designed to absent but to ensure the attendance of ministers on at least three of the five sitting days of the week unless they are out of the city of Ottawa on official business. On those three days, that system takes precedence over House or other government business. In this light it would be hard to argue that the hon. member even has a grievance.

The hon. member raised one other matter which I think deserves comment. He complained that under our new rules it is no longer possible to withhold supply. He cited the case of the old days where, if I understood him correctly, if a member was not satisfied or did not get his way he could indefinitely, presumably forever, hold up supply for the government in the service of the country. As I understood it, that is a plea for what is properly referred to as the tyranny of the minority. I do not think our rules and practices should lend themselves to that kind of tyranny. They are liable to be abused in the same way as is sometimes seen as manifestations of the tyranny of the majority. Both can occur, and both are equally dangerous. In so far as the hon. member regrets the disappearance of this phenomenon, he is crying about what I am glad to say is a lost cause.

[Translation]

When the hon. member for Lotbinière mentioned the President of the Privy Council, I believe he meant the President of the Treasury Board because he was referring to what I said. He claimed that yesterday I suggested setting up ministries of state to better supervise Crown corporations and boards created from time to time by the government. He mentioned the example I gave concer-