

Oral Questions

government consists of and that only ministers should be able to propose the spending of money.

I would like to ask the minister, in all seriousness, if he could relieve the uncertainty that is in my mind about the propriety and even the constitutional aspects of this type of approach. I think the correct procedure is for the minister to ask the Speaker of the House if he might consult with the Law Clerk of the House to see if this move, or this request by the minister meets the propriety which should exist on the part of a member of Parliament, and also to consider the constitutional aspects.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I take the hon. member's question in the seriousness with which it is posed. I want to assure him that what we were doing was simply putting into effect a practice which has been used by past governments in a variety of ways, which is to seek advice from whichever sources. We, as a government, have felt that the best source of advice as to local priorities in the various regions of Canada is members of Parliament.

I simply recall, for the hon. member, that we have had in the past ministerial advisory groups in each of the constituencies. Unfortunately, in the past administration the Conservative government abolished any form of consultation or advisory system involving members of Parliament. When I took over responsibility for the summer program, we attempted to reintroduce a program whereby members of Parliament would be able to provide their advice and recommendations to me. At the same time, we were soliciting the advice and recommendations of our officials, provincial bodies and other community people. Those different streams of advice came into my office and judgments were made as to the best projects.

As I indicated in my speech on Monday, under the new job-creation program we will be reintroducing the idea and concept of the ministerial advisory group. But it is neither unconstitutional nor improper. If it is, it has been improper and unconstitutional for many years. I suggest, although the hon. member is certainly far more experienced than I, that it is really the prerogative of the minister to seek advice from whichever source, and I happened to conclude that members of Parliament are the best sources of advice on our regional priorities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Madam Speaker, in all seriousness, I suggest to the minister that many of us in the House who take very seriously our oath of office, and so forth, would feel much happier if the minister asked Your Honour to ask the Clerk to speak to the Law Officer of the House and get a judgment from him. I would take that as a much better precedent than just the viewpoint that previous governments have done this.

Mr. Axworthy: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's years in Parliament warrant his advice being taken very seriously. I am simply saying that, by precedent alone, this practice has been

followed many times in the past. To satisfy him, I would be very glad to speak to Your Honour, with whom I enjoy speaking at any opportunity, and the Law Clerk.

However, I simply assure the hon. member that there was no intention to do anything improper. This is something many governments have practised. There are all kinds of advisory groups, councils and organizations the government uses to get the best and broadest range of opinion.

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PRIVILEGE**MR. MALONE—FAILURE TO CONVENE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES**

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On Thursday last, May 29, 1980, the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone) raised as a question of privilege the failure of certain committees of the House to meet and attend to their usual business. The hon. member said that a number of those committees had not been organized, that others had met only to have their organizational meetings take place but that they really had not met at that time.

The hon. member for Crowfoot referred in his intervention to a number of specific problems which he thought should have been raised in the Standing Committee on Agriculture or the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry to which the estimates had been referred.

As I indicated in my remarks last Thursday when listening to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Crowfoot, there were two main points at issue. The first was that certain committees had not met at the time the question of privilege was raised in the House. Hon. members will have noticed, of course, that since then at least four committees have been organized and several others have held meetings. For instance, yesterday alone 12 committees were having their meetings, today three more meetings have been scheduled, and there are five scheduled for tomorrow. I hope this will help solve the problem raised by the hon. member for Crowfoot. However, I must again remind the House, as I did at the time the question was raised, that the scheduling of the meetings of the committees does not come under the jurisdiction of the Chair but is the responsibility of the whip of the government as it is stated, and as it was referred to by some hon. members, in citation 579 of Beauschesne.

The second question raised in the question of privilege of the hon. member of Crowfoot dealt with the possibility, or the lack of it, of debating an urgent issue. This difficulty seems to have been resolved in part, as indeed it is possible to resolve these kinds of difficulties, as I myself have suggested in previous rulings. The difficulty raised by the hon. member for Crowfoot has been cured, at least in part, since last Friday the House debated a supply motion dealing with some of the problems referred to by the hon. member and other hon. members who have risen in the House to speak about this subject.