

I firmly believe and I hope one day will be the method by which we operate. If I may, I would just like to refer to the Senate committee document produced in September, 1978. The document indicates that only under revenue dependency will the Department of Public Works be faced with the same kind of financial discipline which constrains private developers, a discipline which should lead to the construction of less costly buildings.

My original suggestion some years ago was that the estimates which are presented in the blue book to which I have referred already—assuring a total for the Department of Public Works of some \$755 million for last year—should in fact be reduced to the salary of the minister and his automobile. I have been frustrated over the years in trying to get answers in committee with respect to the various amounts that are spent by departments for accommodation and so on and, of course, we always receive the same answer, that the moneys are actually spent by the Department of Public Works, and the figures are only given to carry in its estimates. I think the problem which will have to be very clearly identified is that if we ever get to full revenue dependency, we will have to lay down the law to various departments that the figures which will become part of their budgets must, of necessity, be fully understood so that they will be able to answer for those expenditures in committee.

I appreciate this opportunity to continue, but because I intentionally brought with me material only for a 20-minute speech, if I try to go on any longer I fear that I will include material which is not particularly relevant to the subject under discussion. May I only say again that my objective this afternoon is to point out once again the inefficiencies and the inadequacies of allowing six or seven different departments to have their own construction companies and their own construction forces. It would be much more efficient to centralize everything in one organization and, if the excuse for not doing that is any alleged inadequacy, weakness or inefficiency in the Department of Public Works, to ensure first that that department is a top-notch efficient construction organization which can operate in the most efficient possible fashion. If that can be accomplished, then we will have not only a substantial reduction in the number of personnel working in total throughout the various departments, but it will also be possible, via the reorganization, to identify better the millions of dollars which we are spending in the field of construction, acquisition of land, acquisition of building, etc.

I hope that in the very near future some positive move will be made to bring in the necessary changes which will result in these efficiencies.

Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, before I refer to the point at hand, the motion of the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert), I would like to pay a sincere tribute to him because he is one of the few members of this House who takes advantage of this provision in the rules for the use of this time every second Thursday—but really most Thursday, because we do not have many private members' private bills—on notices of

Department of Public Works motions for the production of papers. I hope more hon. members of this House could be encouraged to use this period. It has been noted that the hon. member for Vaudreuil is often on his feet on Thursdays during this hour. That is because he takes advantage of the rules as they were intended, and perhaps other members could follow suit. When they look at pages 94 and 95 of the Order Paper hon. members will notice that there are only perhaps half a dozen notices of motions for the production of papers. If we are to continue to justify this hour being left in our rules, hon. members must take advantage of it. I hope other hon. members will follow the lead of my colleague, the hon. member for Vaudreuil.

● (1730)

I am very pleased to participate in this debate. I do not propose to focus on the substantive questions which the hon. member for Vaudreuil raised, that is the contemplated restructuring of the Department of Public Works in 1970. Rather, my remarks will deal in a more formal way with the protection of confidentiality of government documents.

I would like to explore the background to the important constitutional convention involved while we talk about protection of cabinet documents. Some of the remarks that I will make will follow on the heels of the debate we have had on Bill C-43, which I believe we debated last week. I think it is very appropriate that I deal with this aspect of the notice of motion put forward today by the hon. member for Vaudreuil.

In the few moments that I have I would like to examine the way other jurisdictions deal with executive powers and confidentiality of documents, and to look at the system of government where the executive is accountable to Parliament, such as ours. I will outline various examples.

I shall refer also to the positions taken by other parties represented in the House as well as to views put forward by persons knowledgeable of our constitutional institution. There is a general acceptance in our society, especially among members of this House, that the cabinet system should be allowed a certain degree of confidentiality so that it can make decisions in an atmosphere which is removed from the strains of public pressure. If ministers were expected to consider important issues and make decisions in a fish bowl, that is in full public view, they would inevitably feel inhibited in collectively deciding what is in the best interests of this country. They would be subject to the pressures of those who cry the loudest of the most effective of the lobby groups. This is a real concern in society today, and notwithstanding the fact that we protect the confidentiality of cabinet documents, we see that our system of government is becoming more and more imprisoned by the actions of effective lobby and power groups. In a sense the rights, responsibilities and the duty toward the ordinary citizen in society seem often to get on the wrong side of issues, or to get the short end of the stick. We find very effective, powerful, well-financed lobby groups able to influence decisions. It is my contention that if we were to make the system much more accessible, we would see this tendency to increased pressure