

Government Organization Act, 1970

an opportunity to express itself. That is what we find objectionable about this particular clause of the bill.

We object to the increasing use of discretionary power by this government. We object to this government increasingly bringing in statutes which give ministers discretionary power. In this particular case we are being asked to give the Prime Minister discretionary power to appoint at will whatever ministries suit his fancy. He will be able to appoint the faithful who support him in the Liberal caucus. That is why we object to this particular clause of the bill. We object to another aspect as well. Concomitant with the government's illegal roster system, another obnoxious practice is creeping into this House, one which totally defies the responsibility of the government being responsible to Parliament. I refer to the increasing practice of ministerial statements being made outside this House at a time when the House is sitting. This is clearly against our tradition and practice. In my judgment it is a violation of the rights of this House.

We are used to the government issuing press releases to get around the responsibility of having to make statements on motions. I suppose that practice must be condoned because of the demands placed upon the government by modern, fast communication. But in no way can we condone the practice which is creeping into our system—that of ministers making full-fledged statements of policy outside the House while the House is sitting. In our view, that shows complete contempt for Parliament. We wonder what the future of this institution will be if this government remains in power. This institution which houses the representatives of the people is supposed to be a debating forum. It is supposed to be a forum where the representatives of the people have the opportunity to question ministers of the Crown and the government on their responsibilities.

By rules brought in by this government and railroaded through the House, we have been denied the right to withhold supply. The estimates have been taken out of this House. No longer can we withhold supply from the government. Tomorrow, Mr. Chairman, Parliament will adjourn for ten days. When we return we will have the main estimates to consider in most of the standing committees of this House. These committees will be meeting simultaneously with House sittings. They will be undermanned by members of the government and the opposition because we can only spread ourselves so thin. We will be faced with a bevy of experts who will back up ministers and their deputy ministers.

We are supposed to meaningfully examine the estimates of departments, but it is a futile process because we cannot change anything. According to the new rules, at a certain hour on a certain day, regardless of the position of the estimates in any committee of this House, they will be deemed to have been passed. That is the position in which we will find ourselves at the end of May. That is what the Standing Orders say.

Mr. Drury: You do not understand the rules.

Mr. McGrath: It happened every other year, and I suspect it will happen this year. The estimates of the

[Mr. McGrath.]

Department of Fisheries and Forestry have not even been started. That standing committee is currently involved in examining a clean air bill. By the time we get to the main estimates of that department we will not have an opportunity properly to examine them. Notwithstanding the intervention of the President of the Treasury Board, at a certain hour on a certain day—I think May 20—all estimates will be deemed to have been passed.

We have lost the main power that Parliament once had. We have lost the traditional and long fought for right of Members of Parliament to withhold supply until satisfactory answers have been received from the government. Under the old rules, any member of this House could withhold supply if he had a particular grievance and was not satisfied with the way the government was handling the matter. We have now lost that right.

We are concerned about what is happening to this institution. We are concerned about the growth of the cabinet of this government, which has now reached record size. There are now almost 30 members of the cabinet. There are to be five additional members and perhaps as many parliamentary secretaries. We are arriving at a stage where the majority of the government will either be cabinet ministers or parliamentary secretaries. Therein lies the tale. Perhaps the government is having trouble with its members in caucus and that is why it is bringing in these innovations.

These are the matters which concern us, Mr. Chairman. These practices which the government is bringing in are having the effect of destroying the rights and privileges of this House. They are denying the concept of responsible government as we know it in this country. If the government is opting for a presidential system, why don't they openly say that this is what they have in mind and that they intend to bring it about by an evolutionary process, instead of doing it in this surreptitious manner? This is what the government is up to, I suspect.

I am particularly concerned about the release of important documents outside this House while the House is in session, and making statements of policy outside the House while the House is in session. I suppose every member of the cabinet has been guilty of this, including the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry who made a statement in Vancouver about sealing—

● (8:20 p.m.)

Mr. Boulanger: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I have a very serious point of order and I think this is the proper time at which to raise it. I hope the hon. member who has just sat down for a moment will understand it very well. I am going to read in English—

An hon. Member: That won't help.

Mr. Boulanger:—Standing Order 34 concerning irrelevant or repetitious remarks. Paragraph 2 states clearly that such remarks are out of order and that a point of order may be raised. For the last three or four days the hon. member has been repetitious in every speech he has made. Every time he has got up it has been repetition, repetition, repetition.