

*Supply—Privy Council*

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** I thank the hon. member because it seems to me that there can be no more important business than the conclaves of the cabinet and its committees, and when the cabinet committee is sitting to consider important executive business that is reason enough for the minister to be away.

**The Deputy Chairman:** It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair.

At one o'clock the committee took recess.

**AFTER RECESS**

The committee resumed at 2.30 p.m.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** Mr. Chairman, when the committee rose at one o'clock I was addressing a few remarks to the question of the roster of ministers during the question period. There is a final observation I should like to make on the underlying reasons for this practice. It is related basically to the importance of making sure that there be effective political control if I might use a pejorative term, of the bureaucratic establishment. The function of a minister, as I said before, is not only to be here in the house and respond to questions. I accept the general legitimacy of that proposition. It is also important for a minister to assume responsibility as political head of a department in dealing with the vast apparatus of modern government which has grown up.

One underlying reason that has necessitated the practice the government has followed has been the importance of balancing a minister's time so he could be involved not only in dealing with the executive decisions made in cabinet committee but also that he will have a more effective opportunity to keep in contact—and I do not think the word is too strong—and in control of his department. It is for this reason, in addition to the other reasons I have stated, that I think the change is not only a reasonable but a desirable one considering the need to maintain political control of the establishment.

**Mr. Baldwin:** Mr. Chairman, I make no apologies for the fact that we have had this debate. I feel it has been very useful. I think we are probably developing in the open here the discussion that might well have taken place in a committee room had there been the consultation to which the President of the Privy Council has referred rather than the arbitrary imposition of this practice. It is a

question of advise and consent, which is a term we all know as applicable to the United States Senate. I understood the President of the Privy Council to say he had advised us of this proposal. He did advise, but that does not mean consent nor does it necessarily imply consultation.

I think this is the real problem before us today. Legislative bodies in democratic societies all over the world are puzzled and perplexed by the problems which confront them. The problem is to balance the necessity of putting together the facts that ought to be explained and the responsibility of the legislative branch to make sure that the best interests of the people are served. I think this is our problem. It is easy for the government to produce proposals. They are satisfied those proposals are right and, with all the conscientiousness of virtue, they suggest to the House of Commons that our task should be limited to that of a simple protest.

I am not going to go into all the details of this subject. It is a debate that is world wide. This issue brings us right down to the root of the problem. When the President of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister say, we told you that it was going to happen, they remind me of the phrase, "Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed that he has grown so great"?

The question period is predicated upon the issue of urgency. What might be urgent on Thursday or Friday may cease to be urgent on Tuesday or Wednesday. I believe Mr. Speaker would be justified in saying, if a question asked on Thursday can be answered next Tuesday, that it ceases to have the characteristic of urgency which is a condition precedent to the question being asked. We had an illustration of this situation during the question period today. I think the government is wrong. However, there are ways and means by which something might be worked out. I can readily understand the desire of the government to secure notice of certain types of questions. Something might be worked out with regard to some of these questions along the lines of the principle involved in the United Kingdom which provides for private notice questions. The proposition is that you reward those who give notice rather than punish those who do not give notice, which seems to be what is in the mind of the government here.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council are in fact saying that if we do not give notice of a question then it is going to