

summer home of the prime minister. Members of parliament on both sides of the House—that is, backbench members on the government side—do not have the same information as a serious journalist in the press gallery in Ottawa. I talked to one journalist today who told me that in the course of a year, without looking for it, he is offered the opportunity to interview at least 50 senior officials at the deputy minister or assistant deputy minister level to discuss for an hour or two the programs and policies of their departments. He can ask all the questions he wants and can use the detailed answers he gets, unless he attributes them to any particular official. Members of parliament do not have that right.

I say to you, Mr. Chairman, that the people of Canada elect us to come here to see that the government runs the country as it should. But I say, with regret, that members of parliament have less opportunity to get the information on which to base their decisions than any good journalist in the press gallery in Ottawa—and I say that is a disgrace.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Orlikow:** In his remarks, the Prime Minister said that we have open government. Mr. Chairman, every member of this parliament who sits on committees knows that is nonsense. At any committee dealing with the estimates of a department, which may meet perhaps ten times, the minister will appear once or twice and after that no more. If you ask an embarrassing question, the deputy minister will say—I go back to the kind of thing the Prime Minister was talking about, the so-called theory of responsible government—that the question is on a matter of policy which only the minister can answer.

Let us look at how decisions are made. There was the tax reform which we had after the Carter commission report. The business interests, the mining companies, the oil companies stood to lose a great deal if tax policies in regard to resource industries were changed. But when did they come before the government? Did they come to committee and get ten minutes for their presentation? No. They met, not just with the ministers but with deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers. They made their representations where it counted. The Carter commission said a buck was a buck no matter where it came from, and it should be taxed accordingly.

Then there was a white paper which watered down the Carter Commission recommendations. Finally, there was the tax bill which had virtually nothing in it of what Mr. Carter suggested. That is an illustration of how government really operates in this country.

Let us look at tariffs. In the last few weeks a couple of constituents have written to me because a tariff has suddenly changed. I asked a question today which two ministers said they could not answer. There are large-scale lay-offs at a rubber plant in Whitby which the union says have occurred because there has been a sharp reduction—

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** There he goes, sneaking out.

**Mr. Orlikow:** —in tariffs and an increase of half a million to 3½ million tires per year coming in from the

### *Business of Supply*

United States. Mr. Chairman, you can be sure the people interested in making cars and tires had their say with the senior officials in the Department of National Revenue long before members of parliament ever got to them.

Let us take the discussions going on between the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labour, and I do not know who else, about the so-called consensus that is sought with business, industry and labour unions. Businessmen, manufacturers, retailers and labour leaders all know a hell of a lot more about what the Minister of Finance is trying to do than does any member of parliament. Talk about downgrading parliament! That is the way it is done.

Let us take another illustration of the way the real decisions are made; that is, federal-provincial relationships. I am not talking about just the two or three meetings, well publicized, which the ministers have every year. Almost every weekend when I am on my way home I meet some senior civil servant from Manitoba who is returning to Winnipeg. I am sure hon. members from other provinces find the same thing. These senior people have been meeting with their federal counterparts in Ottawa discussing in detail some joint or shared program for perhaps health or welfare or post-secondary education or anything else you can think of. By the time these questions come to parliament, the bill has been discussed, signed, sealed and delivered and we are faced with a *fait accompli*. If this is a democratic system, then I do now know what a democratic system is.

That is the way the real government of Canada is going more and more—to federal-provincial conferences. I am not saying the provinces should not be consulted. I am not saying that in our federal system, with a constitution which defines the responsibilities of federal and provincial jurisdictions, that does not have to take place; I am saying that when the Prime Minister talks about open, responsible government he is talking about some never-never land; he is not talking about Canada in 1975.

I can say to the Prime Minister and the government House leader that I have learned a great deal more about what the federal government is proposing to do in many fields by talking to the contacts I have in provincial governments, both elected and civil servants, than I have ever learned as a member of parliament. It is an accident that I know these people. Most members of parliament probably do not have access to such contacts. Nevertheless, that is the situation.

● (1700)

The basic question which we ought to be discussing today and are not discussing is whether we believe in open government. That has nothing to do with members of parliament being slighted or downgraded, which is the case now. We ought to address ourselves, as I said, to the question of open government. I submit that unless the government is open, our society cannot be considered as being truly democratic. Yes, we have all the trappings, all the façade of democracy. But the system is not run by the prime minister or cabinet ministers; increasingly, it is run by faceless bureaucrats. They make the hundreds and thousands of decisions which must be made every day, every week.