

House of Commons Act

value to our society or democracy. There is no longer any justification for Members of Parliament, who have finally reached the point where they are getting paid a reasonable salary for the work they do, spending their time jumping up and down in the House like jacks-in-the-box to record their vote. There is a better way, and it is not beyond the ingenuity of mankind to make that possible in this chamber. It is time it was done.

I would like to see a body of some kind, which is responsible to the members of this House, which would administer this place under the direction of the Speaker.

I have seen, in the short time I have been here, the evolution of the administration of this place to a point which I do not like very much. I do not wish anybody to confuse what I am about to say with personalities. I am talking about the structure and not about individuals. We have a position now, Mr. Speaker, in our House of Commons known as that of the Administrator. My recollection of the Senate and House of Commons Act is that it says that this place will be administered by the Speaker and that the Speaker can delegate authority to the Clerk and to the Sergeant-at-Arms. I have no recollection of this act ever being amended to include the position of Administrator. I am concerned at the growth of bureaucracy in this institution. I am concerned that the real authority, the real responsibility and the accountability for the administration of this place is going to fall into the hands, if it has not already done so, of non-elected people. That, in my opinion, is wrong.

I, for one, am going to insist that not only the government, but all members, continue to agitate, continue to insist that every member of this House, whether or not he is a Privy Councillor, is treated the same. All Members of Parliament should have access to government proposals, to government documents that are not already cast in stone, as I said earlier. I will insist, and I hope other members will, that the committee structure of this House be changed and that committees be made meaningful bodies of this House. They should have some authority, and if they do not, we are all wasting our time.

I am prepared, Mr. Speaker, to let the committee do its work for about one more year and if by that time nothing happens, if there are no changes, I will no longer attend it. I am not going to waste my time going through the farce that most standing committees are today.

I support the basic thrust of this bill and I hope it will go to committee so that it can study it and, hopefully, improve upon it and make some suggestions for reform of not only the administration of the House but of the structure of the organs of this House known as the standing committees so that the role of the Member of Parliament will have some meaning in this place.

● (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude-André Lachance (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, one of the most disturbing aspects of the Canadian parliamentary

system which is of course based on the British parliamentary system, is the extremely fuzzy line that separates the executive and legislative functions of the government. This is, of course, best illustrated by the fact that, strangely enough, both legislators and ministers sit in the House. I know that a long tradition has led to this anachronism, where in the House, for all practical purposes, the legislative and executive functions are mixed, and I am also aware that many of our constraints, such as the constraints of parties and the constraints of the government's collective responsibility are self-imposed, and that we are now in a situation where it is becoming increasingly difficult for members to show their independence. There are of course mechanisms outside the House through which members can express themselves, such as the caucus and similar opportunities for consultation.

However, since the early days of our parliamentary system, the situation has evolved to the point where members are, for all practical purposes, subject to extremely restrictive conventions. Do members realize, Mr. Speaker, that the administration of the House is under government control and that is exactly what it is, control. Only Cabinet members sit on the committee or council which administers this House at least as far as the budgetary function is concerned. This is quite extraordinary and totally unacceptable!

One of the first things that struck me when I came to this House, Mr. Speaker, was the realization that as members we had absolutely no control over our administration. None at all! This committee by which we are administered consists of ministers appointed by the head of the government. So we have here a legislative chamber that is actually administered by the government. Except for our tradition of democratic consultation and the rest, this procedure would certainly be applauded by regimes that go against everything we believe in. The sponsor of the bill under consideration referred to our world, and just now I was alluding to that other world to which I am sure no one here would very much like to go. The member is introducing Bill C-273, whose purpose is clearly to instil some common sense and, by broadening access to the administration committee, to give all members of the House an opportunity to sit on the committee and to make the division of powers meaningful. And I entirely agree on that. However, I find it unbelievable that at 4.45 p.m. we should be here dealing with a private bill so fundamental to our institution. I was glad to hear the hon. member for Miramichi refer to parliamentary reform. There are very many things to be done in that area, whether we concern ourselves with committees, votes, internal management or the conventional rules to which I referred a while ago and which virtually compel us on both sides of the House—and I am using a strong word, Mr. Speaker—to act as mere puppets as a result of standards imposed upon us. I think that the matter will require some consideration.