

Government Organization Act, 1970

The Deputy Chairman: Order, please. Is the hon. member rising to ask a question?

Mr. Baldwin: No. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. McCutcheon: Mr. Chairman, I have listened to the debate and since I receive answers every time I ask questions of the minister, I should like to impose again on his good nature. We are now to have regular ministers as we know them today. Then, we are to have ministers of state and parliamentary secretaries. How many persons will this involve; how many government members will be involved? Will there be 65 or 70 people, or how many? We do not have that answer. Another question which came to my mind was alluded to by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East. It concerns the appointment of these people for a full term. Although it would depend on the minister's answer, I can see difficulties in the future. It seems to me the government is making its decision on the basis of the present membership in the House of Commons. If as I suspect there will be 65 or 70 people on whom hands are laid, this will mean there will be 80 to 85 left out. In 1963, and again in 1965, the government members numbered only 133 or 134.

If a similar situation were to develop—and I believe it could develop pretty rapidly—will we still play musical chairs? The point is this that in a House in which the government party had fewer members there will not be much choice after the cream has been taken off the top; not much material will remain. So, I am led to believe the government is really not looking for talent particularly but for a possible means of rewarding the faithful. I wonder if the minister, in his good natured way, would answer the question I threw out at the start of my remarks.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, there are two questions to be answered. First, the hon. member for St. John's East suggested that henceforth we should, as he put it, revert to the old practice of appointing at pleasure and that in some fashion this would relieve an assumed embarrassment to the parliamentary secretary whose pleasure, if I might put it that way, was not continued. At the present time the appointments are by the administration at pleasure for no statutory or fixed term. As the Prime Minister indicated when the most recent changes were made, rather than attempt what might be invidious judgment as between one group or class of parliamentary secretary, none of those who had served for a full year's term would be re-appointed and consequently failure to re-appoint could carry with it no connotation of unsatisfactory performance which might otherwise be the case if there were selections or choices made.

The Prime Minister indicated quite clearly that the reason for doing it in this way was to provide more experience for those Members of Parliament who, if they had to continue throughout the entire session as backbenchers without specific responsibility, perhaps would be denied both further experience and training and also an opportunity, if one can use the term, to prove their worth. In addition, judgment could be made of their

[Mr. Baldwin.]

likely potential. While the present system does result in some unuse of undoubtedly demonstrated talent, I think on balance it would probably be better to provide a wider range for experience than would be the case in respect of the appointment of a parliamentary secretary in an onward and upward fashion irreversibly.

One might also suggest that the government of Canada might profit from what has been the practice in the United Kingdom, and indeed in France, of members entering the ministry or the cabinet for a period, leaving the cabinet for a period and then coming back again. In our country, for some curious reason, it has been assumed that once a man leaves the cabinet there is the likelihood or practice that he will never come back. Perhaps more movement in this direction would be good in the general interest. The fact of the matter is we have not come around to accepting this idea. It is still the case that ministers leave the cabinet if they wish by way of resignation either because this is evidence of disagreement with the government or because they are getting out of the field of Parliament altogether.

The hon. member for Lambton-Kent wanted to know how many members on the government side would be involved in the provisions of the proposed legislation in parts IV and V. The answer to that is imprecise. We now have a number of ministers, some of whom preside over departments and some who are without portfolio. The number presiding over departments is now limited by legislation to the number of departments decided on by legislation and this will continue to be the case in the future. Perhaps the hon. gentleman is asking me to forecast how many more or how many new departments the government might be desirous of putting forward in the interests of better administration, and at the same time to forecast how many existing departments will be either amalgamated or discontinued altogether. It is rather difficult to forecast that until we know a little better how the country as a whole is going to evolve.

● (4:10 p.m.)

There is now no limit on the number of ministers without portfolio. The number of ministers appointed to this category depends on the needs of the government in responding to the particular needs of the country at the moment, and this will continue to be so, the difference perhaps being that in addition to departments of government established by formal legislation there will also be ministries of state established from time to time, also subject to parliamentary approval, according to the amendment we have been discussing today.

In addition to Ministers without Portfolio, which hitherto have been a prerogative of the Crown, there will be a new and rather more specific class of ministers, but in other respects essentially the same, namely ministers of state without designated ministries over which they preside. The number will depend on the administrative needs of the country from time to time. I am afraid that I cannot really be any more precise than that.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): For just a moment, Mr. Chairman, may I pursue the arithmetic that