

Supply—Privy Council

Another matter that shows how ridiculous this whole system is is the fact that it is supposed to save ministers from the wear and tear of parliamentary duty.

Mr. Bell: They are afraid.

Mr. Hees: Of course they are afraid, but the theory the Prime Minister has put forward is that ministers should be saved from the wear and tear of parliamentary duties so that they can devote more time to parliamentary committees, cabinet committees or some other kind of work. But everybody knows that in any country the man upon whom the great responsibility falls is the Prime Minister. He is the one who has to make the decisions. Of all the members of the cabinet, if anybody is to be saved for decision making and relieved of the wear and tear of daily parliamentary life, if that is necessary—and this Prime Minister seems to think it is for his cabinet—the Prime Minister is the one man who should be preserved for more decision making, thinking and planning and not put through the daily wringer of the House of Commons. But the Prime Minister is the one who has decided that he will be here all day each day and he, because his ministers are absent a great deal of the time, will have to do a lot of answering for them because they are not here to do the answering for themselves.

Anybody who has been in government will recognize that for a minister to be in the house every day is the best thing in the world for him. Knowing that he is going to be subjected to questions each day requires him to be far sharper, far more on the job, far more alert to anything that may be going wrong with his department or with matters under his jurisdiction. If he knows he has to be in his place each day in the House of Commons and answer all manner of questions about matters under his jurisdiction then he is going to be far better informed day by day on the things he should know about for the good of the country.

So, Mr. Chairman, this whole plan is wrong from start to finish. It saves the wrong people. It overtires the man who should be saved the most, the Prime Minister. It provides for the absence for five days in a row, from Thursday until the following Tuesday, of the most important minister in the cabinet next to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Any question that is asked of him must be of great importance. It is of national and international importance, but by the time that five days have rolled

around the question is of no importance whatsoever.

Once again, we in the opposition ask the Prime Minister to reconsider the decision he has made to bring about this change, not because we want to be small about this matter or dictate to the government how it shall operate but simply because we have been through the same procedure that the present ministers go through each day. We have been a government. We who were ministers know what it is like to answer questions. We know whether it is a good or a bad thing for a minister to be in the house each day to answer the questions put to him. We know, and ministers across the aisle know perfectly well, that it is a good thing for them to be in the house each day knowing they have to be prepared to answer immediately any question that is put to them about matters under their jurisdiction.

Therefore, once again on behalf of our party and on behalf of the opposition I appeal to the Prime Minister through the government house leader, who is in the chamber, to reconsider this plan because we think it will be for the benefit of the better functioning of parliament and the better running of the affairs of this country if these ministers are available in the house each day instead of being absent, as so many of them are each day because of this rather ramshackle, hit or miss plan that has been thrown at the House of Commons with very little consideration by the Prime Minister. We ask the Prime Minister to be a big enough man to say: We tried it; we do not think it is good and we will go back to the former method of making ministers available in the house at all times.

To the newer ministers in the government I can say they will find out as time goes along that there is only one thing worse than being asked a lot of difficult questions each day and that is not being asked any questions at all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Chairman, I must say it is very useful that the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings has taken the opportunity to comment on this matter, not because of the argument he makes but because of some of the misconceptions demonstrated in the point of view he is taking. It is not without significance that he should have referred in particular to the Secretary of State for External Affairs and should have advanced the proposition that willy-nilly, come what may, whatever the