

Government Organization Act, 1970

bury their mistakes. A highly desirable thorn in the government's side has been blunted.

Mr. Francis: Remember the new procedure we have.

Mr. Rowland: I will come to that in a moment. Next was the establishment of the Prime Minister's regional desks. On the surface, the regional desks would seem to be the Prime Minister's attempt to honour his pledge to bring the government closer to the people. The regional desks will act as the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister in every corner of this country. They will act as funnels of information from the people to the Prime Minister. If a person has a problem he can now easily bring it to the attention of the Prime Minister, or rather to a member of the Prime Minister's personal staff. In this sense, the government will be brought closer to the people.

But what are some of the other results? First, it will mean the by-passing of Members of Parliament. If you can go directly to number one, or be persuaded that you are going directly to number one, why bother with number 264, or even number two? In short, the regional desks will rapidly create a situation in which the executive is expected to act as a check upon itself. The Prime Minister, through his regional desks, will be omniscient and omnipresent. Ultimately, and in a political sense, he will also be omnipotent.

Then came rule 16A, which substituted for freely negotiated agreements on the allocation of time in the House the absolute authority of the government House leader, even if he was opposed three to one, or even if he met by himself, to set down any arrangement for the allocation of time for the consideration and disposition of any item or items of the business of the House or its committees. The opposition succeeded in defeating this attempt to create a gag for the House, but another rule only slightly better, the son of 16A, is now part of the Standing Orders of this House.

Then, there are the countless executive task forces and commissioned studies which have been established and announced to the public with great fanfares of publicity since this government took office. However, there has been only one Commons committee of inquiry. The executive task forces report to the cabinet, even to the Prime Minister, directly. The cabinet decides whether the findings should be made public, and the reports are declared privileged documents. This has resulted in an increase in the information gap between ministers and other members. It has also resulted in the glamour and publicity surrounding the cabinet, while the House has been pushed back into the shadows. I could go on and cite other examples but I believe I have made my point. In any event, I can make the same point again by referring to the section of this bill which deals with ministers of state.

In introducing the bill, the President of the Treasury Board offered the following justification for it. As reported on page 2769 of *Hansard*, he said:

In essence, the government organization bill deals with the constant challenge facing Parliament and the government to be as efficient as possible in doing those things which are in the interest of the Canadian people and society. This challenge is

[Mr. Rowland.]

imposed upon us by the rapid changes taking place today, and our response in this regard must be positive. Both Parliament and the government must be flexible; both must adapt their procedures and structures; and in the final analysis, the test is whether they are continuing to respond effectively to the needs of society and of the world with which they must deal.

In short, the argument is one of efficiency. One simply cannot quarrel with the objective of enabling the government to readily adapt itself to changing situations. But the means selected to accomplish this are something else. Two kinds of efficiency are involved: efficiency in terms of rapid policy development by the administration, and efficiency in terms of the adaptation and strengthening of our democratic institutions. I submit that the ministers of state proposition contained in this bill indicates the government has opted entirely for the former at the expense of the latter.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, may I call it five o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There would have to be unanimous consent to call it five o'clock. Is it agreed that the Chair call it five o'clock?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Gleave)—Trade—Steps to limit imports of Australian and New Zealand beef; the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter)—Industry—Construction—suggested removal of sales tax on building materials; the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis)—Government Property—Vancouver—suggested refusal of lease to Four Seasons Hotel.

It being 5 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper, namely Notices of Motions (Papers).

Mr. J. A. Jerome (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, on one previous occasion the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) brought before the House one of several Notices of Motions for the production of documents standing in her name. At that time it was agreed that she would select one of them and the others, all in the same category and dealing with the same subject matter, would go off the Order Paper.

Pursuant to this agreement, one of the hon. member's motions is coming before the House again, and it is agreed that the same procedure should be followed. The House will therefore proceed to the consideration of Notice of Motion No. 130, standing in the name of the