

Business of Supply

Mr. Reid: Mr. Chairman, I think the short answer to that is that the government told the House of Commons a year ago—

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, the parliamentary secretary will have ample time to speak on his estimates and perhaps he will explain to us how it is that the estimates of the Prime Minister's office have increased over 40 times in the past ten years. Perhaps he can also explain to us the growing practice of the government to hire outside consultants, a practice which has even found its way into the office of the Prime Minister and the office of the President of the Privy Council. There is an item in the estimates of \$1 billion this year for consultants.

I should like to ask the President of the Privy Council a question concerning security. We are now told by the former President of the Treasury Board, the present Minister of Public Works, that every department of the government now has within its estimates funds dealing with security. Perhaps he will explain the role and function of the officer for security planning, and what kind of budget he has.

He might tell us what the relationship is between this function and the communications branch, for example, of the Department of National Defence. Perhaps he will explain the relationship of this security planning officer to the RCMP. To whom does he report? Exactly what are his functions vis-à-vis these other security services I have mentioned. Also at the same time the President of the Privy Council might tell the committee exactly how much of the funds within the estimates are allocated for security purposes about which this House has no knowledge.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I should begin by giving a rather general description of the functions of the Privy Council office and quote from the document that has been referred to with such admiration by various spokesmen for the other party, that is, the paper on the changing role of the Privy Council by Gordon Robertson, who at that time was Secretary to the Cabinet. He said some interesting things about the role of the office of the Privy Council which refer to security as well as to other matters, and I will deal with that after I have dealt with the general principles.

Mr. Robertson at page 19 of this paper said this:

The Privy Council Office operates no programs and administers no projects except those which are related to its own housekeeping. Administration and action are with the departments. It is the minister who is responsible and his department that acts. The Privy Council Office remains aware and is frequently informed or consulted, but enters the game only if inter-agency operation is required where a 'neutral' can provide a co-ordinating service or where there is a requirement for counsel and assistance that can only be provided by those with a general view.

Mr. Clark: Quote from page 15.

Mr. Sharp: Yes, I could quote some others, but this is sufficient to illustrate the role of the Privy Council within the government. In the case of security that is its function. It is a co-ordinating function. It provides a secretariat to the cabinet committee, and when necessary it takes a co-ordinating role in seeing that the various activities in this field are co-ordinated, and of course if the matter gets to the cabinet committee it acts in the secretariat capacity.

[Mr. McGrath.]

It never takes the lead. It is a co-ordinator, just as are other members of the staff of the Privy Council office.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, the President of the Privy Council has just described virtually to the letter the function and the role of the co-ordinating security planning committee of the Department of the Solicitor General. How can he explain the duplication?

• (1750)

Mr. Sharp: Quite simply, because there are various departments that play a role in security, the Department of the Solicitor General, the RCMP, the Department of National Defence, and various other departments. The hon. member must remember that all departments have a security function with respect to their own papers and to their internal security. That applies to the Privy Council Office as well as to all departments.

Mr. McGrath: The President of the Privy Council has told the committee that the security division of the Privy Council Office is primarily a co-ordinating function relating to all departments of the government. This has been the explanation given to the House by the Solicitor General of the role of the security planning group within that department. Now we find we have two co-ordinating security planning groups. Perhaps the President of the Privy Council will answer the part of my question dealing with the cost of the so called security co-ordinating planning division within the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Sharp: I repeat what I have said, that the Department of the Solicitor General has the responsibility for the co-ordination of security in so far as police are concerned; it does not have responsibility for the security of the Department of National Defence or of the Department of External Affairs. These are very special problems. There are occasions when it is necessary to co-ordinate all the security activities of the government, which is the function of both the committee and of the supporting staff of the Privy Council Office.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to deal with another phase of the responsibilities of the PCO and PMO, particularly as they affect parliament. I am speaking now of the role and the emergence of the federal-provincial conference as an intricate, permanent structure in our governmental system which was never provided for in the constitution. I will say that it is to the credit of the President of the Privy Council that he has expressed concern over the erosion of the power of parliament vis-à-vis the estimates of the government, but I would like to ask him if he can tell the committee whether there are any plans to involve parliament in the federal-provincial process which has now become a separate and alternate function of government. If so, perhaps he will tell us who is responsible for the liaison between the functions of these federal-provincial conferences and parliament, and how far parliament will be involved in that aspect.

Mr. Sharp: When the estimates of the Privy Council Office were before the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates there was some discussion of the role of one of the functionaries within the Privy Council Office, namely, the secretary responsible for the organization of