

Government Organization Act, 1970

opportunity was provided for a substantial debate to take place in connection with the appointment. It does not exist now. I shall not get into that argument this evening because there were some aspects of the change which I accepted, though there are others which I have never liked. Be this as it may, the minister is bound to agree that the opportunities which existed for members on this side of the House under the rules before they were changed several years ago are not present today.

Mr. Drury: Not true.

Mr. Baldwin: The minister may wax indignant. He smiles as he speaks and I do not think he really believes what he says. He knows that the opportunities available to us now are nothing like they were before the rules were changed. That is a statement which in my opinion cannot be denied on the basis of the facts.

Mr. Drury: I will deny it.

Mr. Baldwin: The minister may deny it but I am talking about facts. This is the difficulty we face. It may be that within a month or within six months of this legislation being passed, a proclamation will be made and the cabinet will promulgate an Order in Council which will provide for the establishment of a ministry of state to deal with housing. Parliament will not have seen the terms of reference. It will have had no say in establishing the conditions under which the ministry has been set up. It may be we shall be given an opportunity to ask questions, but I contend that the representatives of the people of Canada are entitled to suggest what the terms of reference should be in a matter so vital and important. The same considerations apply to the creation of ministries dealing with science, the status of women, and so on.

The minister cannot deny that the government would have the power to establish these ministries, to disestablish them or to vary their functions. It has been demonstrated beyond doubt by members on this side of the House that an opportunity to discuss such matters on estimates in the confines of a parliamentary committee does not permit the free and unhibited discussion which is essential. It is difficult enough for this party, with 72 or 73 members in the House, to staff committees and maintain attendance in the chamber. It is even more difficult for the party to my immediate left, with 23 or 24 members, to do so, or for the Creditiste party to do so. In any case, there is no opportunity for the kind of debate of which the minister has spoken. I think he is speaking only from his experience as one sitting on the treasury benches. He has not had the edifying experience of sitting in opposition.

Mr. Drury: I have.

Mr. Baldwin: Obviously the hon. gentleman was not there long enough. That is something we shall try to remedy at the next election.

Mr. Drury: It was not my fault.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

Mr. Baldwin: It will not be our fault next time, either. I can see the hon. member sitting here after the next election reading my speeches and trying to imitate me.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Drury: This is fantasyland.

Mr. Baldwin: I believe I have answered the minister. I intended to answer him because he had the decency to drive right to the root issue. However, he did not deal with the subject in such a way as to convince me. I listened hard. I am very easy to persuade. If he had made a case, I would have been prepared to say so. But he fell far short of doing so and I cannot accept his argument.

Before I sit down, let me say that one of the problems we shall face if this legislation is passed is a proliferation of ministers. The hon. member for Ottawa East, who was occupying the chair the other day, spoke about reading the Bible, an apt book to be reading at that time. After all, the Liberals are trying to create a land of milk and honey where there will always be a place for deserving backbenchers. Like the armies of the south in the early days, all the generals will be privates. Under those conditions it is a sad, sad story indeed.

● (9:50 p.m.)

What are the dangers inherent in this situation? The first three rows of the government benches will be filled with ministers, with ministers of state responsible for a ministry of state and with ministers of state who have been deprived of the opportunity of administering a ministry of state. Then the parliamentary secretaries will sit behind them.

What about the confusion that we have observed in the last few days when ministers of the Crown have said that "X" is brown and ministers of state have said that "X" is white? Perhaps on this point I could simply read an editorial which appeared in the *Ottawa Journal* last week.

Mr. Mahoney: Take your time; there are five minutes left.

Mr. Baldwin: The article reads:

Uncle Sam must be puzzled about his Canadian nephews these days. While our energy minister and our northern affairs minister are going hell-for-leather to get the Americans to run their Alaskan oil through a Mackenzie Valley pipeline, our communications minister says it would be "a kind of industrial suicide." Even foreign minister Sharp is asking that the Pacific route be scrapped. Our Prime Minister indicates he doesn't find confusion embarrassing for the government hasn't decided its policy!

The decibels are the message.

There are other ways for Mr. Trudeau to encourage public discussion of a vital issue than set his cabinet running off in all directions. What about some of those parliamentary assistants or articulate backbenchers—mightn't they ventilate provocative views?

As it is we have the two ministers presumably most concerned telling the Americans they must not use the Pacific coast route and must use the Mackenzie route, but the Prime Minister telling the Americans at the same time that Canada hasn't yet decided whether it wants the Mackenzie pipeline.