

Business of Supply

Mr. Stanfield: The House leader himself admitted that he did not have competence, that things did not come under his authority and that he would have to seek the answer from someone else and get it second-hand.

Mr. Sharp: That's right; just like the Prime Minister.

Mr. Stanfield: What possible reason is there for the committee not to hear from the officials rather than through some filtered version brought in, in his own inimitable way, by the government House leader?

Mr. Sharp: Because we are responsible, not the officials.

Mr. Stanfield: Ministers are responsible to the House for policy, and members of the opposition have a responsibility to the people of Canada to make inquiries relating to expenditures.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: We are entitled to that information and I suggest that gobbledygook, talk about responsible government and distorting the concept and the principle of responsible government is no answer at all. This has become a large area of government operations. I am not suggesting that committees should be able to receive answers as to matters of policy within the office of the Prime Minister, but if a committee of the House wants to question the principal assistant to the Prime Minister on certain matters relating to administration and certain matters relating to expenditures, I do not know why there is anything improper about that and why that does not come within the terms of reference of parliament generally as to what is appropriate to inquire into.

Policy matters in the office of the Prime Minister are clearly no business of ours. I wish to make the point that ministers are exercising a prerogative of determining which of their officials may appear before committees regardless of the wishes of the committees, and the government on the whole is blocking off a large section of the government service, making it immune from questioning by government committees and attempting to justify this in terms of responsible government. I simply say that that is a complete distortion of responsible government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Before the Prime Minister made his long-winded speech which was clearly an abuse of the committee, I did not intend to say very much and I am not going to say anything more at this time. I am not going to interfere with the questioning or statements by my colleagues down the line here. But I hope that after the Prime Minister leaves the government House leader will give some justification for the failure to disclose contributions relating to the swimming pool, besides the precedent alleged in connection with Stornoway; that the government House leader will give some justification for the scope of the expenditure, and that he will agree that it is appropriate for committees to hear evidence, ask questions and receive answers from members of the public service provided that these are not in the area of confidentiality or policy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Beatty.]

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, this should have been, and could have been, a very important debate. We should be debating how the democratic system of government works in an age as complex as the 1970s. Instead, we have dealt with what may be much more interesting to the gossip columnists in regard to how much the swimming pool costs and who paid for it, which is irrelevant to the running and effective operation of government in this day and age.

We backbenchers know the pressure of work for the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and other important government officials, and if it is felt that for the well-being of the Prime Minister a swimming pool or stocking fish at his summer home is needed, I do not think the people of Canada will object. I think they would be and are prepared to pay for these things directly, without having anonymous contributors paying for them. But to me, those are not the important questions. What is important is how the system is working. Do we have an open system? Does the public know what is going on? Does the public receive the facts on which it can come to intelligent conclusions about the important questions which have to be dealt with by government? That is what is important, and not only is it impossible for members of the opposition to receive the information they need but it is impossible for the general public to receive the basic information it requires.

It is not just the Privy Council office which has grown in size; every department of government has. I have discussed this on other occasions. The number of senior executive officers grew from 381 in 1968 to 895 in 1973, the last year for which I have figures. It may have been necessary to increase the size of the senior civil service by that number, but neither the Prime Minister nor any other minister has given an adequate explanation of why it was necessary. At the time that increase was taking place the government was hiring hundreds of consultants to do studies on separate questions. Tens of millions of dollars are paid out in fees, and what happens to the studies? They become the property of the government of Canada. The research they do and the conclusions they come to are locked away in files and are not available to members of parliament, to journalists or to the general public. How can the public decide on important questions in these circumstances?

● (1650)

A few days ago a senior journalist of the *Globe and Mail* wrote a long article about development in northern Canada. He related the continuous conflict between senior officials of Environment Canada who are concerned, as they should be, about the deterioration of the environment there as we begin to use the resources, and the economic development officials of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I do not know, neither does any other member of the House except perhaps the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, which side of the conflict holds the correct opinion. How can I know when the information on which each side comes to its conclusion is hidden from everybody?

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that this is the question we should be discussing, rather than the question of who paid for the swimming pool or for stocking the lake at the