

role in policy formulation. With the evolution of society and the complexity of modern social, economic and other problems, the administration of government has grown much faster than the House of Commons, much faster than the Parliament of Canada. I am not advocating that this House should grow much larger, but I am advocating that the members who sit in this place should have a great deal more to say than they now have about what happens here, and that means a very drastic change in the Standing Orders of this House.

This is one of the things for which I have been agitating since the end of my first year here. It is one of the things we are promised with every new session of Parliament, but it is one of the things that has never been accomplished. It is my hope, and I have some faith that it will be fulfilled, that in the next session of Parliament we will take a comprehensive look at the Standing Orders of this House. I suggest that when that is done we should also take a comprehensive look at how this place itself is managed.

One of the subclauses of this bill suggests that the Speaker have the power to delegate any or all of his or her administrative powers to the commissioners. I have some difficulty with that. I believe we must always retain the Speaker of this House as the guardian, the protector and the ensurer of the rights and privileges of the members. The Speaker of this House is not above the other members of this House; the Speaker of this House is the first among us, and in fact in this House no member should be above any other. However, the Speaker must be responsible, in the final analysis, for the administration of the Parliament of Canada and for the protection of the rights and privileges of its members. If the Speaker is to delegate all of his or her authority, I have some difficulty in determining how the Speaker is to fulfil that role. That is a role I do not want to see taken from the Speaker.

We have many problems in this House. We have a problem as a result of every member being treated as though he or she represented an urban riding. It is obvious that the needs of members representing rural ridings may be quite different from the needs of members representing urban ridings. When I talk about needs I am talking about the necessity for staff here and for staff for constituency offices. The manner of staffing those offices may be very different in rural areas and in urban areas. I have a riding, for instance, which covers some 5,500 square miles. It is about 150 miles in length. Obviously that is quite different from the riding of Spadina, for instance, or Edmonton West.

● (1630)

Mr. Wilson: What happened in Spadina?

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): The people made a choice in Spadina, and I have no argument with that. That is the basis of our democratic system.

I am afraid the basis of our democratic system is not always adhered to in this place. I think, for instance, of question period. It is virtually impossible for a backbench member on the government side of the House to get a question during

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question period. Members are not always equal in this place. I understand there are quotas, and I do not blame the Speaker for that. Those are conventions which have grown in this place over the years. They are conventions which I believe are dangerous to basic democracy.

As I said earlier in my remarks, each of us has the same responsibility toward those who elect us. I have a great deal of difficulty in trying to justify to my constituents that I have not the same right and the same opportunities in this place to ask a question as does the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), for example. He just happens to sit on the other side of the House. It seems a very serious disadvantage to me when compared to the other members in the House. I want to reiterate that I do not blame any individual, only the fact that over the years conventions seem to have become regulations or rules, and I do not think that is right.

The hon. member for Edmonton West said we are governed here by a system that is an anachronism. I agree with him. In fact, I am beginning to believe that this whole place is an anachronism. The rules, our Standing Orders, are an anachronism, and it is high time the rules of this place were brought into the twentieth century. It is high time we had a legislative calendar such as the legislative bodies in other democratic countries have. It is high time we stopped sitting during the kind of nonsensical hours we do. We should have a reasonable schedule so we can plan our work and have sufficient time in our offices to deal with our constituency problems.

Much of the debate that goes on in this House, Mr. Speaker, is quite useless. It accomplishes nothing.

If committees were restructured and reduced in size to a maximum of 11 members and if the membership on those committees were made nearly permanent so that members do not play musical chairs in committee, we would be able to do very meaningful work there.

The government of the day should be willing to refer to committees substantive matters in the form of proposals rather than policies so those people who are formulating a particular policy can be called before a committee to justify the choices they might put before a minister. This should not be done when these policies have been carved in stone and have become pieces of granite which are known around here as bills. It becomes virtually impossible to change a policy once it is written in a bill and presented to the House. Unfortunately, that is about the only time it is referred to a committee, after it has been presented to this House as something which is already untouchable.

The voting system in this House is another anachronism. My colleague, the hon. member for Sarnia (Mr. Cullen), brought this up earlier today during question period. I heartily endorse what he said. It would be a little nostalgic but there is something to be said, of course, for members having to stand in their place and vote because each member is standing up and accounting himself to the people who elected him. However, Mr. Speaker, when we have a situation such as we had last night where even when the votes had been grouped we had very repetitive actions taking place in this House, it is of no