

means to control that power. In a modern state, it may well be impossible or even undesirable to reverse the first trend. But surely we cannot let that power grow unscrutinized and uncontrolled.

I think it is safe to say that if we saw a corporation, a union or any other private agency accumulating the power that is developing now around the office of the Prime Minister, we would want to develop some assurances that the public interest was being served. It is particularly important that we apply that same standard of scrutiny and control to an office whose original authority was as a creature of this House.

The resolution before us suggests simply that this is a matter which we cannot ignore. It does not propose a particular remedy or imply that anything improper has been done. It simply asserts that the tradition of parliamentary control requires at least a formal consideration of the powers which now attach, and the restraints which should apply, to the most powerful office in our political system. There is a danger, of course, that this discussion will be seen as simply one more step in a struggle for power between members on one side of the House and those on the other, or between the executive and the legislature. However, that is not the case, as I hope my arguments have shown. There is another dimension to the problem; it is the very real harm that can be done to a country like Canada by any concentration of power.

Our federal parliamentary system was not developed by accident or by simple, blind importation from elsewhere. We are a diverse country and we need institutions which both reflect and accommodate that diversity. The best institution for that purpose has been parliament, because it draws its membership from truly every corner of the country and has traditionally encouraged its members to express the views of their locale. But parliament was never designed to be simply a talking shop; the assumption was that the Prime Minister and the cabinet, who came from parliament, would heed the views of the various locales. If they didn't, in theory, parliament would bring them down.

But parliament, the forum of diversity, has lost this control over the executive, and the Prime Minister is increasingly able to construct a government which reflects his own views better than it reflects the diversity of the country. If that double trend continues—the weakening of the forum of diversity and the empowering of a particular group—those regions and attitudes which lack power will naturally tire of the system. That is the special Canadian danger of this kind of concentration of power, and it must be on our minds as we consider the powers and prerogatives of the office of the modern Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for its attention and hope that this resolution will commend itself to the support of hon. members.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) for bringing this subject to our attention and also on the excellent speech he has just made in favour of his proposition. I agree with him it is important for us to examine the

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institutions of government from time to time, to analyse changes which concern us and question the direction government seems to be taking, especially if it is one about which we do not feel comfortable.

The hon. member would not expect me to agree with him in all regards, but I do share his concern about the way in which various government institutions are developing in an attempt to cope with the questions which confront them—questions to which there are no easy answers. The point I am making is that government develops in response to stimuli from outside. It is no accident that within the last 15 or 20 years the power, as well as the expenditure, of government has expanded to a remarkable degree. The government has acquired a whole series of new powers, not because of any particular attempt on its part to do so but largely in response to developments within Canadian society which have forced it to act, to legislate, to transfer authority in order to carry out detailed programs approved by parliament.

It is true that today, as when this country came into being in 1867, the Prime Minister is the first of equals. It is true now, as it was then, that the Prime Minister is called to his office by the Governor General. And it is true now, as it was then, that the Prime Minister calls upon colleagues of his in the House of Commons to sit with him and form a government which is responsible to the House of Commons. All this still applies. Nothing has changed. The Prime Minister is subject to parliament. The way in which parliament organizes itself is a significant factor in the success which it can expect in controlling the executive, of which the Prime Minister is the head—not the whole, not the heart and not the soul.

● (1720)

I think it is important to realize that the powers of the Prime Minister today are really no different from what they were 100 years ago; it is the scope of government that has widened. The powers of the government have increased, and with that increase and greater scope so also have the powers of the Prime Minister increased in keeping with the expansion of government in general. I think it is important to realize that the powers of the Prime Minister are totally dependent upon the powers that this parliament gives to the government.

Having said that, I think it is important to look at the development of the Prime Minister's office as it stands today. As hon. members know, it was the Liberal government in the days of Louis St. Laurent that brought in the concept of the executive assistant. It was the government of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) that brought in the concept of the special assistant—in other words, staff designed to serve the minister as minister.

What we have in the Prime Minister's office is the same kind of staff, except that the constituency of the Prime Minister is not a region in a province, in some cases in one of the smaller provinces, but the whole of Canada. For it is the whole of Canada which the government and the Prime Minister seek to govern, and to govern in tune with what they feel is going on. For example, half of the staff of the Prime Minister's office today works in the correspondence section. The Prime Minister received an unparalleled