

Supply—Legislation

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I should like to say a word or two on this matter. As the hon. member for Laurier has mentioned, all of us fully appreciate the heavy responsibilities which rest on the shoulders of whoever is charged with heading the government of our country. We all sympathize with the present Prime Minister, who is faced with the very heavy tasks attached to his office. And I am sure that every one of us, wherever we sit, would wish to extend to him any facility which would permit him to discharge those responsibilities in the easiest possible manner.

But I think that would have to be conditioned by the rights which are attached not to individual members of parliament alone, but to parliament as a whole; rights which have their roots in rich tradition and history; rights which have been respected over the years and which are recognized by all who subscribe to our concept of parliamentary government. It should be noted that the effectiveness of parliament may be determined by adherence to practices and privileges which can come only from parliament.

The hon. member for Laurier asked the Speaker whether or not he was consulted by the Prime Minister before the latter decided on the employment of the particular device about which comment is now made. The Speaker in reply said he had not been consulted by the Prime Minister, that there had been no communication between himself and the Prime Minister. I believe, however, that the question goes much further than a mere consultation between the Speaker and the Prime Minister, and certainly further than a mere declaration by the Speaker of what might have been decided upon assuming that there had been consultation.

I would think if the Prime Minister had consulted the Speaker it would be a matter of obligation for the Speaker to advise the house, and in some form to obtain the permission of the house. We all have the greatest confidence in His Honour, but I am sure the Speaker would not regard as his prerogative a decision of that kind. It is a decision that would have to be made by parliament itself.

The hon. member for Kootenay West was quite correct. When Her Majesty's Prime Minister in the United Kingdom decided to employ an electronic device to enable him to be in more continuous contact with the House of Commons the matter was brought to the attention of the house prior to the device being installed. Hon. members who are familiar with the parliament at Westminster will recall that in the dining room and in at least one of the commons rooms

[Mr. Herridge.]

hon. members are enabled to meet with constituents and visitors while out of the chamber, particularly at the dinner hour, and through a ticker tape device or similar mechanism that is employed there they have an opportunity of knowing what is being said at that moment by a speaker in the house.

There is a debate to be found in the British *Hansard* on that very subject. A committee had recommended that this technique be employed, but it was decided upon only as the result of a common agreement entered into by the members of the House of Commons. We should not be misunderstood, then, in our comments this morning. No one has complained about the desire on the part of the Prime Minister to keep in close contact with this house through the device employed; but the Prime Minister, who has in the past been so jealous of the rights of parliament, will be the first to recognize that in so far as the rights of parliament are concerned, Prime Minister or no Prime Minister, his rights are not any greater than those of the most recent acquisition to the membership of this house. Every hon. member of parliament standing before Mr. Speaker has the same privileges and the same obligations.

I am sure the Prime Minister would recognize that because, as I say, so much of his time in the past in this house and outside has been spent in reminding us and the nation of the richness of our heritage symbolized by this form of parliamentary government. In his zeal to preserve the traditions and liberties of this house he would be the first, I know, to condemn with the rest of us any change in practice that would in any way destroy those traditions and privileges.

Mr. Speaker will recall that when in the throne speech debate I complimented him, as other hon. members had done, on his election to the speakership, I mentioned the observation of Mr. Harold Nicholson who had said the Speaker was, after all, the custodian of the rights of parliament and of the rights of minorities in parliament. I would suggest to the Speaker that in the prudent way in which he does these things he will want to give consideration as to how this particular matter can be brought back into a proper setting in accordance with our traditions and rights. If something is not done what is to prevent—I do not say through the Prime Minister but through some other person—by the electronic devices which in this modern day and age we have decided to set up, finding ourselves, notwithstanding a decision of parliament, in a position where our