

Privilege—Mr. Rae

the judgment of the Chair is that arguments have been presented to the point where they are being repeated, and that therefore the Chair does have the views of the members on a particular question and can decide at a certain point that the Chair is sufficiently informed.

I will hear the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) on the basis that he does have a new dimension to bring to this debate.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I have several new dimensions I want to bring forward. The first one has to do with cabinet practices. We have heard the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) say here today that it has been the practice in government—I believe I paraphrase him correctly—since confederation to establish regional ministers so that regions of more populous areas in Canada can have direct access to the executive, in addition to the access that population would have ordinarily through its own elected Members of Parliament.

We are in accord with the establishment of regional ministers throughout the country for the purpose expressed by the Prime Minister, but this government and this Prime Minister have carried this practice far beyond what has been the normal and proper practice of the appointment of regional ministers for the purpose enunciated by the Prime Minister.

When we were in office we had the practice of appointing regional ministers for each of the provinces and for each of the two northern territories, but that is as far as it went. The practice now being established, as evidenced by the document tabled today, expands that principle immeasurably. It deals with the two most populous provinces—and only those two in Canada—the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, and we no longer have regional ministers. The document on its second page is entitled “Quebec regional responsibilities” and beginning on the fourth page it establishes Ontario regional responsibilities but, clearly, a cursory examination of that document will disclose that it is not regional ministers which have been appointed but constituency ministers for each constituency of the province of Ontario and ministers responsible, so-called, for each constituency in the province of Quebec. That goes far beyond the customary practice, which has been established and existed for so many years in cabinet, of regional ministers.

Had the Prime Minister and the government stopped with the first page of that tabled document, we would then be following past, well-established and proper practices, because that first page deals only with regional ministers. That is the proper practice but, having gone beyond that, they have gone far beyond the time-honoured practices of the past and have in fact established an entirely new policy and a new practice.

I wondered why the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) became so incensed and waxed so eloquently when the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) raised the matter last Thursday, but I know now. They were troubled. They knew what they were doing was wrong. That is why the Prime Minister participated today. We never see him in debate in this House. In the past 12 or 13 years I think he has participated in debate about five or six times. That is why he was here. The Minister of Finance could have tabled that

letter. Indeed, we all expected him to do so as a result of my questioning of him yesterday, but it was considered important enough, because it was trouble to them, for the Prime Minister to appear here today to do it personally.

Mr. Knowles: The Solicitor General let the cat out of the bag.

Mr. Nielsen: Some cat; some bag. Some bag, indeed, with this system of constituency ministers.

An hon. Member: Carpet bag.

Mr. Nielsen: That is a good name for it, the carpet bag. A new system of carpetbagging has been established now in these two provinces.

I am afraid the second dimension will escape the Chair because no attention is being paid by the Chair to the dimensions I am trying to convince the Chair it should consider. The Chair has heard the first one, and perhaps I should wait until the conversation between the Speaker and the Clerk is finished. I do not want my points to be lost on the Chair.

Mr. Lonsdale: We didn't miss much on the first one. Give us the second one.

Mr. Nielsen: The hon. member is not in his seat, so I do not know which is his riding. Undoubtedly he is speaking with his constituency office minister trying to get one of those envelope cheques fly out of every so often.

The second point I want to draw to the attention of the Chair concerns the establishment in some constituencies of so-called “ministerial offices” for which Treasury Board has approved person-years, salaries and rents. However, this appears to have been done on a very highly selective basis.

I know there is one in Vancouver. The minister who I believe has been authorized to establish that so-called “ministerial office” is in the other place. He has no ministerial responsibilities except to be the leader of the government in the Senate. I suggest that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) examine the guidelines for the establishment of ministerial offices to determine whether the existence of that office and the expenditure of those taxpayers' moneys for the upkeep of that office fall within Treasury Board guidelines. I do not suggest that, because that particular minister has no ministerial responsibilities being the leader of the government in the other place, but he certainly cannot be considered a minister with ministerial responsibility.

I cannot hear the hon. member opposite. If he wants to interrupt, he should stand so he can be heard.

Expenditures on ministerial offices should be in accordance with Treasury Board guidelines. That is a matter very directly related to this question raised. The other aspect of this is whether taxpayers' money is being properly expended in the establishment of these offices.

Edmonton has such an office. Was that office established so that the minister in the other place responsible for economic