

*House of Commons Act*

administration of the House of Commons also bear on the privileges of Members.

There was a case a week or two ago wherein the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Nielsen) objected to certain carvings being removed from the boardroom in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. He rightfully objected. He made the argument that his privileges as a Member were affected in that those carvings were an integral part of the history and the lore of the House of Commons and that there was no authority by the House to have these carvings changed. I believe the Speaker upheld the Leader of the Opposition in his argument. Even in a small administrative matter of that nature, it did have a bearing on the privileges of the Member.

In Britain the commission meets quite frequently. I understand it meets more frequently than the Commission of Internal Economy here who, as I understand it, have a hard time getting together not only over weeks but months. Ministers of the Crown have other important duties. If I were a Minister of the Crown, being a Member of that particular commission would not be my priority. As a Member of that commission, I would not be responsible in the House on a day to day basis for the administration of the House. There is not a "Minister of the Commission of Internal Economy" who is asked questions; it is the Speaker, or questions are raised in another manner.

I understand that there are four Ministers on the Commission of Internal Economy. Every day in the House of Commons they have to answer for their departments. The administration of the House is not their authority, nor should it be.

Representations were made to the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure that the executive branch of Government is, in a sense, taking over the House itself. It is not only the fact that the Prime Minister's office is in the building, as indeed it should be, but that the Cabinet room is here and other rooms have progressively been taken away from Private Members for Members of the Cabinet when Members of the committee have their own departmental offices.

I am not giving my own view on this because I have not made up my mind, but the argument that came forward in this committee is that this represents encroachment upon the rights of individual backbenchers in that the executive branch is, in a sense, taking over the precincts of the House of Commons. There may be some validity to that, but we could never hope to get that changed unless the administration of the House of Commons did revert to—perhaps that is not the word because it has never been the responsibility of ordinary Members, but perhaps be given to a commission such as in Britain.

The Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) spoke earlier in the debate. I want to quote him because he raised an important matter. He spoke rather eloquently. I quote:

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 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.

I certainly agree with the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi. I fail to see how this basic principle of parliamentary democracy in the Westminster context that we enjoy in Canada can be observed by the changes proposed by the Hon. Member for Edmonton West.

There is in our House of Commons other problems in terms of administration. We have a Committee on Management and Members' Services. Although I have been around here for a few years, I fail to recognize the true role and powers of this committee and have yet to understand the work of it. The Hon. Member for Edmonton West, who is a member of that Committee, might want to enlighten the House as to what it does.

Perhaps if we adopted the U.K. model and put in our own commission with the Leader of the House, a representative of the Leader of the Opposition, a representative of the third Party and three non-Cabinet members, we may be able to abolish the Management and Members' Services Committee or amalgamate the two functions and have a truly representative body.

● (1630)

One problem exists now, Mr. Speaker, and that is, that in the last two years since Madam Speaker took the Chair, we have seen the emergence of an Administrator of the House of Commons. I believe that that Administrator has performed the administrative duties assigned to him exceedingly well. I know that there have been disagreements here or there, but the problem as I understand it is that the Administrator's responsibilities are not mentioned in Standing Orders. There is no real authority for this person who has, in a sense, developed into a person of the same rank as the Clerk of the House and the Sergeant at Arms. I believe that that should be remedied. Perhaps it could be remedied in an all-encompassing Act that could deal with the point raised by the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), and perhaps that with that Act we would see the emergence of a truly representative kind of administration for the House of Commons.

I think that that is about all one can say on the matter. Again I believe that the idea is worthy of discussion, but I believe that the Hon. Member for Edmonton West focused too narrowly on the issue. The administration should be discussed in a wider context. What should be done in this Bill and what is not done is to truly wrestle the administration of the House of Commons away from the executive branch. I am not so sure that the executive branch really wants the responsibility of administration anyway. I have not heard any stout arguments in defence of the executive branch having so much control over the administration of the House of Commons.

Perhaps the Hon. Member would be gracious enough to withdraw the Bill and bring back a Bill later in the session that is more all-pervasive, a Bill that is a bit more thoughtful and that takes note of the true desire, which I am sure that we all