

*Office of Prime Minister*

First, whatever the theory, the fact is that our system of government in Canada is a system of cabinet government, not parliamentary government. Occasionally, initiatives by private members are adopted by the government and from time to time members can amend a bill in committee or the whole House. However, the bulk of the power of initiative lies with the cabinet. It is the same in Britain, and one distinguished participant in and observer of the British system, the late Richard Crossman, suggested that in the system of the Mother of Parliaments, the process of a concentration of power has gone even further. Writing a decade ago in the introduction to Bagehot's "The English Constitution", Crossman said:

In Bagehot's day, collective cabinet responsibility meant the responsibility of a group of equal colleagues for decisions taken collectively, after full, free and secret discussion in which all could participate. It now means collective obedience by the whole administration, from the foreign secretary and the chancellor downwards, to the will of the man at the apex of power.

We have no expert testimony on this trend in Canada, but it is safe to assume—and certainly it is the public assumption—that the Prime Minister controls his cabinet and that it is the Prime Minister, not the cabinet, and certainly not parliament, who regularly makes the final and the important decisions.

Second, the power of the Prime Minister grows as government grows. We have increasingly an interventionist state which controls or strongly influences more and more of the processes of our society. The merits of that development can be argued another time. The simple point I want to make is that as the government becomes more powerful in the nation, so does the leader of the government become more powerful. The present Prime Minister, by virtue of his office, has much more power in Canada than did Louis St. Laurent, John Diefenbaker, Lester Pearson or any of his predecessors. The state might have got out of the bedrooms of the nation, but it has more than made up for that everywhere else, and the one office that has grown most in power is the office, in Mr. Crossman's words, "at the apex of power".

Third, the same active agenda which has increased the role of government has decreased the power of parliament to control government. Parliament once had a virtually unlimited power to scrutinize and delay. While parties might disagree about the nature of specific reforms, all of us recognize that the old, easy rules would not have let the business get done. But we have paid a price for that reform, and the price has been that at the same time as the powers of the executive have increased, the powers of parliament have decreased; so we have less control on bigger government.

The fourth factor in the growing power of the Prime Minister is television. Today, every head of government has become a star personality whose advisers cultivate the talent to manipulate opinion and whose office has the permanent opportunity to command attention. Professor Denis Smith, in his article "President and Parliament" argues, and I quote:

Canadian Prime Ministers have always made their primary appeal for support not in the House of Commons, but outside, to the electorate.

That is much easier now, with mass media. All of us here, if we are realists, know that the most effective place

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for a Prime Minister to get his message across is on television, not in this House. That is a fact of life which adds immensely to the power of the Prime Minister and diminishes, again, the capacity of this parliament to control an official whose whole authority is presumed in theory to arise from this chamber.

Fifth, the present Prime Minister has, in effect, established for the first time a new "Department of the Prime Minister" in the privy council office and the office of the Prime Minister. His purpose was to provide a means by which he, as head of government, could keep track of and co-ordinate the various initiatives of a mammoth government. I understand that purpose and, speaking personally, approve of it as the only means to ensure that there is, in fact, some over-all control of the direction of government by the elected politicians whom the Prime Minister commands. However, this new department was created in the absence of authority from, or discussion in, parliament. It operates beyond our scrutiny and, having the ear of the Prime Minister, it has the capacity virtually to change any direction or challenge any initiative that arises either in parliament or in the public service.

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Without dwelling on them too long, I would suggest that certain other forces which traditionally have restrained a Prime Minister have been weakening recently. For example, we accept the notion, without much evidence, that Canadian political parties control their leaders and, in particular, prevent them from the excesses we associate with Watergate. But when did that last happen? Did the Liberal Party in Newfoundland ever restrain Joey Smallwood? Did the Union Nationale restrain Maurice Duplessis? Parties do not behave in that way because they know that in attacking their leader they attack themselves. This is particularly true now that campaigns are so heavily influenced by national media and voting is more often for the personality of the leader than it is for the local candidate or a specific issue.

Again, we have assumed that a Prime Minister can be controlled by the public which, at each election, has the chance to "throw the rascals out." However, public control of the Prime Minister depends upon a competitive electoral system. In Canada, the electoral system is, unfortunately, not competitive in Quebec, which means, as it did in 1972, that a Prime Minister can be rejected by most of the country and still survive.

Finally, there is the argument that the professional public service can provide a counterbalance to a powerful Prime Minister. That capacity also is being weakened, first by the deliberate establishment of a "Department of the Prime Minister", precisely to confront such a capability in the public service and, second, by the increasingly frequent appointment to public service positions of individuals who have personal or partisan loyalties to the Prime Minister.

Hon. members can disagree about the extent or significance of any of the factors I have discussed today, but I think we must surely all agree that two main trends are occurring. The first is a trend toward the concentration of formal and informal power in the office and person of the Prime Minister. Second is the weakening of any effective