

be permitted to say on the substance of the matter, however, that members of the opposition have not all understood the intention of this change. The two hon. members opposite argued that we were in a difficult and untenable position because ministers might be in their offices upstairs and there would be no acting minister to answer for them. My reply is that it is not our intention, if a minister is in his office upstairs or attending a cabinet committee, which is more likely, to have an acting minister answer questions on the specific days when it is not intended that questions on departmental matters under the jurisdiction of that minister be answered during the question period. There would be no acting minister or parliamentary secretary speaking for that minister on specific days.

When a minister is away from Ottawa, or unable to attend for reasons of business or ill health on the days which have been attributed to that minister, members of the opposition know there will be an acting minister or a parliamentary secretary here to answer questions. Therefore the argument that it is improper to have an acting minister here if the minister is in his office does not really apply.

We do not intend to have an acting minister here on a day that is not a day set for a minister to answer questions in respect of his department or his responsibilities. Having regard to the suggestion that there might not be the right combination of ministers here on Mondays, for example, I can only say that we are prepared to discuss this with the opposition. If hon. members desire a different type of roster, so that on some days the Minister of Finance will be here whereas on other days the President of the Treasury Board will be here, we are prepared to be as accommodating as possible. The system is based upon a desire to ensure that the members of the opposition will have days on which they know they can obtain answers from the minister, if he is in Ottawa, and from an acting minister if the minister has been called away from Ottawa.

• (2:50 p.m.)

This is the basis of the proposed reform. I can only suggest again that we have not actually tried it for very long; therefore I would plead with members of the opposition not to oppose this system before they understand how it works. It is apparent from the two statements just made that they do not understand how we intend making it work.

Attendance of Ministers in House

Mr. Bell: No one does.

Mr. Trudeau: Well, certainly you do not. Perhaps the system is a bit complicated, but it should not be beyond the ingenuity of members of the opposition to realize that to have 29 ministers here every day of the week just in case a question might happen to come their way, when they could be in their department or speaking to a cabinet committee—

Mr. Forrestall: Or golfing.

Mr. Trudeau: —would be an inefficient use of parliamentary resources.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: Just because it has been done in that way for hundreds of years does not mean that we have to continue doing it in that way for hundreds of years.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: I think any type of profession, business or enterprise which every day of the week would require 29 members of a board of administration present when perhaps an average of only 10 or 12 were needed, would be an inefficient way of employing these people. It is also an inefficient way of employing the people the electors of Canada sent here to work for them. That is why we are proposing a more efficient use of these resources.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, the question that arises is, have our privileges been interfered with? There can be no question of that. The Prime Minister unilaterally declared that the rules of parliament, as they now are, are not what he would like them to be, and therefore made a decision binding upon the house. This to me is an extraordinary position. I have not the reference before me, but I seem to recollect that the first prime minister of the United Kingdom, Sir Robert Walpole, took the stand that questions were out of order. That has not been parliamentary procedure in that country since the days of the Pitts, nor has it been in Canada from the earliest days of our parliamentary system.

What has happened? The Prime Minister says they have 29 ministers now, and that is so. There is a multiplicity of ministers. They are growing faster than rabbits. At the rate of increase we have seen in recent months I can