

Supply—Legislation

Mr. Martin (Essex East): As long as they are not points of order.

Mr. Chevrier: One has to do with a matter which came up for discussion in the house some little time ago, and that was the admission by the Prime Minister that he had installed a loudspeaker system in his office. When I say he made an admission, I should add that it was mentioned first in this chamber by another hon. member. The question I should like to ask is whether this matter had been discussed with Your Honour. Perhaps I could reserve the second question until I have received a reply.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I should answer that question by indicating how the loudspeaker system in the House of Commons originated and how it is operated. I think hon. members will recall, and certainly the hon. member for Laurier will recall, that in 1950 or 1951 a committee of the house was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr. Speaker Macdonald to deal with the question of sound amplification in the chamber, which had been under discussion for some time, and the committee reported to the effect that a system similar to that in use in the United Kingdom parliament should be adopted.

Following the authority given in that way by the house, the installation and operation of the equipment was undertaken by the Department of Public Works and has been carried on by that department ever since. So there is nothing in the votes now before us which relates to this system. Obviously, however, it is a matter which is under the direction and control of the House of Commons. I am not sure what was the question which the hon. member asked me—

Mr. Chevrier: The question was, did the Prime Minister discuss this with Your Honour at all?

Mr. Speaker: No, the Prime Minister did not discuss it with me.

Mr. Chevrier: Perhaps I should make the position a little clearer. I am not complaining about what has been done in itself. I think the duties of the Prime Minister and his obligations and responsibilities to the country are such that there are decisions which perhaps he has a right to take in certain circumstances, and I am not complaining of this decision. What I am complaining about is the fact that it was not first discussed in the house, having regard particularly to another point; that this is a matter which concerns parliament, not the privy council or the Prime Minister. His Honour the Speaker has said it was not discussed with him.

The next question is this. Does the Speaker, in view of the responsibilities he holds, and

in view of his position, think this matter should have been discussed with him before it was done and announced in the house?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know that I should express an opinion of the kind the hon. member invites me to express. I agree that the control of the amplification system is a matter for the house.

Mr. Chevrier: I know that the actual expenditure comes under the Department of Public Works, but this goes far beyond that. It is matter affecting the rights of members of parliament, because if this were pursued to an extreme, I suppose every hon. member would have the right to demand the same privilege, which would be ridiculous, I agree at once.

The point I am trying to make is that while the expenditure and control and installation of the public address system are matters for the Department of Public Works, surely the other aspect, whether a member should take it upon himself to make this extension, either rightfully or otherwise—I am not discussing that in itself—is a matter with regard to which the Speaker should be consulted. Surely the Speaker, who is the first commoner, should be advised, and he should be the one to announce it to the house rather than the person—rather than the Prime Minister—who did so on this occasion. What I am complaining about is not the decision itself, not the principle, but the fact that we were not told about this prior to it being done.

Mr. Herridge: I rise to support the protest which has been made by the hon. member for Laurier and his approach to the situation and his expression of his understanding of what should have been the proper procedure.

I understand that when the Prime Minister was replying to a question I raised in the house on this same subject some weeks ago, he mentioned that Prime Minister Macmillan in the United Kingdom House of Commons had a similar device. I presume he got the idea when Prime Minister Macmillan was visiting Canada. However, I understand the matter was raised in the British House of Commons and that it was the cause of some jocular comment, as is very usual in the British House of Commons, possibly because they have a greater sense of humour there than some of the rather stodgy people who inhabit this chamber.

Be that as it may, I think the hon. member for Laurier has established a sound proposition, and that the Prime Minister should have brought this matter to the attention of the house so that objections might have been raised or assent given.