

Supply—Privy Council

organizes its questions someone responsible in a department will take them as notice. I repeat that this morning four ministers who were supposed to be here to answer questions were not present, and several times the Prime Minister asked hon. members to defer their questions to another day.

Reference has already been made to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Under the new system the Minister of Transport will be lost to the house at six o'clock on Wednesday and will not have to appear again until the following Monday. We know that that minister is engaged in housing discussions and talks and this week has appeared in the house only once. Therefore the Prime Minister's theory, which seems so logical as a theory, breaks down in practice.

From our experience of the past week we have seen that departments do not give answers to questions. Just to direct a question to a department, with only an acting minister or parliamentary secretary in charge of it, is as effective in getting an answer as the job a eunuch does in a house of ill repute.

There are two principles involved in this matter, one a small one and the other affecting the parliamentary system. We have already spent one or two hours today discussing this matter on the estimates of the Privy Council. If matters proceed as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggested and the whole procedure is reviewed and reformed, there might not be the reaction and negative criticism of this system that we have experienced to date. The small principle involved is that the house gave unanimous consent to setting up a procedure committee to review all the rules, and the next day this rotation system for ministers was introduced arbitrarily. That did not help breed the confidence and respect that the cabinet must have.

This brings me to the larger principle so far as efficiency is concerned. To use the logic of the President of the Privy Council, if it is a question of numbers that is involved, often we might need only the Prime Minister in the house. If we extend the logic of the President of the Privy Council to its ultimate conclusion, there will be days in this house when one, two or perhaps at the most three ministers will be involved in the actual cross-fire and when the Prime Minister, as the person ultimately responsible for the government, will be the one accountable from this point of view.

[Mr. Nowlan.]

• (3:10 p.m.)

There is another point which I direct to the President of the Privy Council. Again it flows from some of the discussion which has taken place today. As a member of the house and as one who has practised before the bar he is aware that there are all sorts of rules. We have heard of the work to rule provision. I suggest that notwithstanding the rules of law there must be, for the effective prosecution of justice, some confidence built up between the protagonists. Justice prevails in the courtroom because both counsel have a mutual respect for each other which they have developed through their trial experience. In like fashion somewhat the same principle must guide us in this chamber.

There is no doubt that the government has sufficient numbers to steamroller the opposition. One member mentioned ridicule. Sometimes it is necessary for the opposition to revert to this type of thing in order to defend itself. I believe, however, that in order to pursue some of the objects the President of the Privy Council has in mind there must be some mutual respect and confidence between members on both sides of the house so that they will be able to develop the pros and cons of the problems and experiments without becoming lost all the time in political warfare. I am not suggesting that the question period is not the time for political capital or political deficit, depending on how the answers come forward. But after we have had this trial for a period of a week, have seen the question period really start to degenerate and have heard what the minister said this morning, I believe, having in mind the desire of the rules committee to look at all these rules, we should build up the respect and confidence between members when we experiment from time to time rather than say arbitrarily that we will proceed in a certain way because this is what has been decreed.

I believe we can say that this system has not worked. In this new parliament with 97 new members I believe some respect and confidence must be built up with regard to members across the way because our whole purpose in many instances is identical. There cannot be that respect when an arbitrary and unilateral move is made in an area where it ought not to be made, that is, in the reform of the rules of this house.

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, I have been listening very carefully but I am at a loss to explain in a convincing way, at least to