

as the new explanation which was invented some time between February 18 and 19 and given by the Minister of Finance on February 19.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I want to enter into this debate on the question of privilege because I must confess or admit that I have been responsible for the setting up of this system of traditional regional representations in so far as my party is concerned.

Some hon. Members: Ah, ha!

Mr. Trudeau: In spite of the "ah ha's" from across the way, it is a time-honoured practice. I recall in the government of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) that they ensured that certain regions which did not have many elected members found ways of sitting around the cabinet table by choosing members of the Senate. The whole purpose of cabinet, which forms the government under our parliamentary system, is to ensure that it hears the voices, understands the representations and, hopefully, fulfils the needs of the various regions of our country.

Some ten years ago, following this practice, which I believe dates back to the beginning of confederation, I received nonetheless complaints that because of the distinction between the legislative and executive branch, it very often happened that ridings which were well represented by members of our party or members of the opposition parties still found they did not have direct access to the government, as opposed to the legislature of this land.

I believe that is why the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) was very wise in including the words "in this House of Commons" which were quoted by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) as part of his third point, I believe.

● (1610)

In this House of Commons we are all legislators, first and foremost, and we all represent one constituency in this country. But, under our system, there is also an executive branch, the government, which is sometimes chosen from this side and sometimes chosen from over there, whether we like it or not. Naturally, they are members of a given political party. But their job, over and above their job as legislators, is to ensure that in the execution of policies, and in the selection of policies, the different areas of the country are well heard, well understood and as well represented as possible.

It is on this basis that as far back as nine years ago, I believe, having heard from many people across the country that they lacked this direct contact with cabinet, I appointed a minister responsible for each region, or each province. In the case where there is only one minister from a province, whether or not there are other Members of Parliament, it was a simple matter of saying, for instance, that in the province of British Columbia the Hon. Ray Perrault, Senator, represents that region around the cabinet table—obviously not in this House of Commons, since many able members from the opposite side

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speak for the particular ridings in that province. But they are not present, unfortunately for us, at the cabinet table. Though we made an attempt to get some of them into our cabinet, none were willing. Therefore, we made sure that there was, at least, a voice from that province at the cabinet table. In that sense there are regional ministers.

The difficulty arises when, in a province, there are several ministers rather than one and, therefore, provinces where there are a considerable number of ridings, particularly Quebec and Ontario where there are 70 and 80 plus ridings. In a case like that, we make sure that the regional minister—and there is one who is senior, in that sense, for each of those two provinces—has the assistance of other ministers sitting in cabinet from that province. For reasons of convenience, we try to distribute the ridings in that particular province so that each minister would have a small number. They were not particularly designed to represent opposition seats, they were to cover all seats. If the House wants, and permits me later, I will be tabling the list of such ridings which are represented by the various ministers.

Once again, in the case of a province where there is only one minister, he represents all of the ridings in that province. When there are several, the House will find that several ministers have divided up the ridings, as it were, and paid particular interest to that particular riding, or those particular ridings.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I think that the first point made by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood distinguishes between ministers for regions, which he seems to admit are traditionally correct, and have been traditionally recognized, and not ministers for ridings. I would point out that in light of my explanation, the hon. member's first point is probably invalid and spurious, since within a province there can be several regions and within each region there can be several ridings. Once again, it is a matter of making sure that the various regions, provinces and ridings in the country have direct access to the government. I believe this is essentially the point made by the Minister of Finance when he answered the question raised by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood. If I read *Hansard* correctly, and I was not present that day, the hon. member's question had nothing to do with a particular letter or the particular action of one of the regional ministers; it had to do with the theory. This theory is based on recognized practice since the time of confederation and some eight or nine years ago our government refined it a bit further to make sure that in provinces with large and numerous ridings there are several ministers to assist each other.

The origins of this practice go back a long time, as I explained, and the reason for it is to permit access to the executive arm of Parliament. But I found it is particularly urgent in times like ours, because of the size of our country, because of the remoteness of our capital, because of the lack of representation of members of a particular region or province on the government side, whether it be our government or the government which was presided over by the Right Hon.