

*Privilege—Mr. Nielsen*

resolution of concerns that may develop in respect to DIAND responsibilities in the north.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that the Commissioner, the senior civil servant appointed by the minister, is responsible for co-ordinating the efforts of almost 3,500 federal and territorial civil servants in Yukon, as if that were not enough communication to the minister's office. If he establishes an office for the purpose of giving Yukoners the same access to the minister as other Canadians, what is the purpose of the Commissioner being appointed at all? What is he doing? He has a director of northern affairs responsible for almost 1,000 federal civil servants in Yukon, 1,000 direct links to his department, to say nothing of the director of northern affairs he appoints.

In short, Madam Speaker, the minister has established, in precedent-setting circumstances, a political office in Yukon. It is nothing less than that. It will be noted that the office was established in privately-leased premises, not in government quarters. It performs only the functions of an ordinary constituency office. This House makes a generous allowance to me, in my opinion, for the operation of a constituency office. The taxpayers have to bear that burden. It also provides a generous allowance for staffing that office. The individual who has staffed that office since its creation, I believe in 1972, has been providing a most adequate service to my constituents.

Then the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development comes along and establishes a political office for the purpose of undercutting, undermining and eroding my responsibilities. Whether it is myself or anyone else makes no difference; it is legally and morally wrong for the minister to take such a political action and use, as he has, public money to support that operation.

Search as you might in the Treasury Board guidelines for the establishment of ministerial offices, Madam Speaker—and this is something with which you are familiar—you will find no authority for ministers of the Crown to establish ministerial offices in constituencies which they do not represent.

● (1530)

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), who is in his seat, knows full well, as do you, Madam Speaker, and as does the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy), that they are entitled to establish a ministerial office in their own constituencies so that they might perform their ministerial responsibilities when they are in their constituencies. Similarly, there is provision under Treasury Board guidelines for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, if he should so choose, to establish a ministerial office in his constituency for the purpose of discharging his ministerial responsibilities, and for that purpose only. But here he has established, going beyond those Treasury Board guidelines, a ministerial office, not only in my constituency, but also one in Yellowknife, according to page 8026 of *Hansard*, and one in Calgary, Alberta. He now has ministerial offices in places which have literally thousands of public servants to maintain that communications link which he gives as the excuse for establishing those offices.

In my submission, that is an illegal use of public funds; but more important to me is that he is impeding my ability to perform my responsibilities as a Member of Parliament representing that constituency.

I will let the hon. member from the Northwest Territories speak for himself with respect to the Northwest Territories, and those hon. members from Calgary who are here can speak for themselves with respect to the actions of the minister in their constituencies.

I would not be stretching any imagination, nor could I be accused of exaggeration whatsoever, if I asked you, Madam Speaker, to accept the fact that those offices have been established for political purposes. The individual on staff there, who has a salary range of \$17,549 to \$20,321—which, incidentally, is beyond the salary range which is provided for the hon. member's own staff in that constituency office—is performing exactly the same function that my constituency office and my constituency office secretary have been performing for eight years in a very adequate fashion. It erodes my function; it erodes my effectiveness as a Member of Parliament. Indeed, it creates a political situation which is extremely undesirable.

I am sorry that this matter had to be raised, because only one person staffs that office at the moment. However, if this practice is allowed to continue, then the rights of other hon. members will be affected, as have mine.

I do not know what to propose by way of remedy. The easiest remedy would be for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to close the office, in Whitehorse and the one in Yellowknife. Because there is no way he can convince any reasonable Member of Parliament that, with 7,000 or 8,000 public employees in the two territories combined, there is not sufficient communication linkage between himself and his departmental officials here in Ottawa. It seems to me that little purpose is served in setting up an office in the private business sectors of these communities and staffing them with individuals of his choice.

If you find, Madam Speaker, that I have an appropriate question of privilege and that the actions of the minister and his illegal use of public funds seriously impair my ability to carry out my responsibilities as a Member of Parliament, I would move the appropriate motion to have the matter referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. This might be a very wise moment to allow this question to go to the standing committee, before the practice grows, so that a decision could now be made as to whether this kind of practice will be permitted to expand. If the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development can do it, and taken back-to-back with what has happened in Broadview-Greenwood and all the other Ontario and Quebec constituencies, who will be the next minister to set up so-called ministerial offices beyond Treasury Board guidelines in constituencies where no Liberal member is sitting? That, indeed, seems to be the purpose and the practice. It is a practice which, in my own personal submission, should be stopped at the earliest possible moment. Even if you do not accept that personal submission, Madam Speaker, surely the easiest and fairest way to have the