

Government Organization Act, 1970

That is where the whole friction in this debate occurs, because we are simply afraid to give such sweeping powers to any government. If we were on that side and the people over there found themselves—in reduced numbers, of course—on this side, I am sure they would be standing up and making exactly the same argument. When you have classic battles between the powers of the executive and the powers of Parliament, once in a while Parliament has to dig in its heels and say, “Only so far and no farther.” We must have our say.

That is what I am asking for, Mr. Chairman—and not only on behalf of members on this side of the House. I will not embarrass anyone on the other side—although I could name members—but I think I am speaking for them as well. There are members who would like to say what they think should be contained in any new department dealing with housing and urban affairs, or a science ministry. God knows, the mistakes in the science field are legion and nobody in this place can be exonerated from them. For the past 35 years we have been making mistakes. Perhaps it would be better if we were all made more accountable for mistakes in that field.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women have caused a great deal of excitement in Canada. It may be that the least likely source in the House would come up with the best ideas. Nobody has a monopoly on ideas: 22, 24 or 28 cabinet ministers have no monopoly on ideas. We are here to swap ideas. You will notice that I have not turned this into a housing debate, Mr. Chairman, but when the time comes to deal with urban affairs and the housing problems of the nation I do not want something presented to me on a platter. I would rather consider ten ideas even if only one were accepted.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, I acknowledge with appreciation the fact that we did not get into a housing debate. I think the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants has quite sincerely expressed the dilemma which faces a number of people who have intervened in this debate. There is an unwillingness to hand over to the executive greater powers than it now has. In other words, what is being sought here is a delegation of parliamentary authority to the executive, but there is a feeling that there will not be adequate provision for calling them to account. I am afraid this is based on a misapprehension to some degree.

The House leader for Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition knows about the ability of the executive in the United Kingdom. It is granted a unitary form of government rather than a federal one and has a much larger lower chamber than we have, and consequently one would expect a somewhat larger membership than ours. The United Kingdom, of course, is the source of most of our parliamentary traditions. The executive of that country has a total limit placed on their members of ministerial and quasi-ministerial rank, and within those members the size established in respect of interrelationship is left entirely to the executive to determine. There is no necessity, no demand even, that changes within this framework will be set in advance, as is being suggested here, apart from Parliament.

• (9:20 p.m.)

Our tradition in the functioning of the executive has largely been derived from the royal prerogative and has been more conditioned by the desirability of having from the outset the strictest of parliamentary control, which has brought a consequent lessening of that prerogative. Departments and ministers with the authority to head departments in this country, I suggest, have been up to the present established through a special statute setting up the department. Subsequently funds are provided in the usual fashion on an annual basis through the Appropriation Acts.

However, there still remains, as I pointed out before, the prerogative right of the Governor in Council to appoint in unlimited numbers ministers without portfolio not in charge of departments as such, having functions and duties which are defined by the Governor in Council and are not subject to prior parliamentary approval at all. There is, however, one element of parliamentary approval which must be sought, which is not related to the nomination or definition of these functions. Parliamentary approval must in every instance be sought to provide the funds with which the staff must be paid to enable the minister effectively to discharge whatever responsibilities he has been given. In addition to that, Parliament is asked for and grants—or up to the present has always granted—the amount of the annual salary for ministers without portfolio.

What we see here is a proposal which will have the flexibility of the prerogative in relation to the appointment of ministers without portfolio. I think our recent experience has demonstrated that the kind of flexibility which is necessary to appoint a minister quickly in response to a seen need, to appoint a minister in charge of a particular, new function, to appoint a minister who will address himself largely to a new problem which has arisen and to provide for proposed policies and solutions which eventually can only be implemented by Parliament through the provision of the necessary funds, is useful in an era when change appears to be the rule rather than the exception. Frequently, if one can respond rapidly and effectively, the problem—I have heard speeches to this effect—will be less than it otherwise would be if allowed to drag on without being met quickly.

What is sought here is to provide that feature, that flexibility of response and, further, to provide, under the designation or title of ministers of state, for the appointment of ministers who will be in terms of responsibility and stature the equivalent of ministers heading other departments. Consequently, they will receive the same salary and those other considerations given to a minister but they will not normally be in charge of a large operating function or the running of programs for which normal departmental organization is required.

Such a minister will need, in order to fulfil his functions, a staff consisting of relatively few highly skilled people who will assist him in the process of analysis and development of policy. If the policy development as subsequently approved by Parliament calls for the establishment of a large number of public servants to put the