

ings to study a situation. I will go into that in a few minutes. My letter continues:

The upshot was the naming of an advisory committee of the House of Commons to Mr. Speaker and the commissioners which has sat so far under the chairmanship of a member of the Opposition. This latter fact was as a result of keen negotiations I had with the government representatives on the committee where we had the Honourable Angus MacLean to offer as an experienced parliamentarian as chairman.

I think it was a stroke of genius on the part of the committee to accept the Hon. Angus MacLean, because he was probably the most respected Member in the House at the time. He was extremely knowledgeable of this place and a keen observer. He was followed by Bob Coates, MP, as chairman. I went on to say in the letter:

However, you may recall that the other day you and I discussed briefly the nature of the administration of the House of Commons and its rather sad state in a number of sectors. One of the reasons that this is so is the grave difficulty of getting together the Commissioners of Internal Economy because of the pressure of their other duties.

This had been communicated to me by the then Speaker as being one of the biggest difficulties in getting decisions. I continue:

It is a rare occasion on which these representatives can be brought together to assist Mr. Speaker and frankly the situation demands better than that. Even sixteen years ago, when I had a brief term of duty as Speaker, it was very difficult to get together the board, and I suppose this may have been at the root originally of my concern about the nature of the administration of the House.

Now, I say advisedly, Mr. Speaker, that there has been a change in the administration. It has been tightened up very much. But there are many of us who feel that the House of Commons has now become in effect almost another department of government. This is a natural reaction of the people who have been brought in to head various sections of the administration. With the greatest respect I say that I do not think the Speaker has the time to oversee fully, as he or she should, the administration of this House as well as look after the responsibilities of being the Speaker of this Chamber. With the greatest respect to the Chair, I say that I think the Speaker's role should be defined as being that of being responsible for the operation of this Chamber and the social responsibilities of the first Member on the Hill. However, the nuts and bolts of the restaurants, the health services, the pay services, the pay scales and negotiations with Hill staff should not be the day-to-day responsibilities of the Speaker.

● (1710)

Matters such as facilities for Members and conditions under which they travel should be considered by a commission board generally composed of Members of the House. We are dealing with nineteenth century paternalism. The Speaker and four Cabinet Ministers decide what facilities and amenities I and my colleague from Dartmouth should have. They decide how many times he should be able to travel to his constituency and what is required of constituency offices. Cabinet Ministers have their passes and assistance provided through other means. They are so busy with their offices, departments and constituencies that they cannot give the required detailed attention to examine the proposition with regard to Members. The net

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result is that although they attend commissioners' meetings—I gather they are now on a more regularized basis—they know nothing of what is on the agenda. They receive their advice from the Administrator or from the Speaker who has been advised by the Administrator and other administration officials, whether it be the Sergeant-at-Arms or the Clerk.

I say that is wrong. We have plenty of talent among Members who could handle this job much more effectively and responsibly for the constituents of the board of the Internal Economy Commission who are Members of the House of Commons, their staffs, and the staff of the Hill. That is why I want to see the change.

This is done in a different way in the United Kingdom. The Speaker is still the nominal head and takes a certain direction depending upon the personality of the individual. There is a board which operates usually with a junior Cabinet Minister as the responsible head. A number of staffs at Westminster are unionized. I have been there when the dining room staff, for instance, was on strike. They have a great habit of going on strike. Those negotiations must be carried on by someone authorized to do so on behalf of someone.

As a matter of fact, I would strongly contend right now that the office of the Speaker is not authorized to negotiate collective agreements on behalf of Parliament or the House of Commons with members of the parliamentary staff. The commissioners themselves do not do so. There is nothing in the Senate and House of Commons Act which says that they can do it. Therefore, there has to be legislation introduced which will set up a commission board presided over, if need be, by the Speaker, with power to add a flexible body, but a body definitely corporate in law which can be a party to a collective agreement should one come about.

At the present time those who are asking about collective agreements on the Hill are baying at the moon. The Canada Labour Board, biased as that body may be, cannot authorize the House of Commons by law to be the signatory of a collective agreement. That legislation will have to be brought forward. Doing so provides the opportunity to change the nature of the board of the Internal Economy Commission.

There are a lot of things about which Members are complaining. However, they have no sounding board. There is the Management and Members' Services Committee. The chairman of that committee has never met the commissioners in session. He has never been brought in for consultation as to the nature of recommendations put forward by the advisory committee. Mon Dieu, que c'était un dialogue de sourds under the previous Speaker. The situation has deteriorated to the point at which it became sheer frustration on both sides. That is a committee which is non-partisan. I have been a member of that committee since 1975, and so have many others. It is non-partisan. We are looking after the interests of Members. I have never seen a body that was so frustrated and angry, and that was unnecessary. There was a breakdown in communications which should never have happened.

How can we improve on that? I am not trying to knock the situation merely for the sake of knocking it. I want to improve