

*House of Commons Act*

● (5:00 p.m.)

At the same time, within that ambit, I would point out that really Mr. Speaker is not a free agent in so far as the expenditures of moneys, the estimates of the House of Commons and its operations are concerned. In so far as being a member of the Commissioners of Internal Economy is concerned, Mr. Speaker is one member, along with four others, who happen to be by law members of the Privy Council; in other words, in practice members of the cabinet.

We are concerned here I think with a question of the sovereignty of the House, the mastery of the House over its own affairs, the degree to which the House of Commons should be able to involve itself in the preparation and development of its own activities. For some time now, we have been moving in a direction with which I agree and with which I am sure most hon. members agree. We have been moving into an era of greater activity, greater theoretical—if nothing else—force behind the activity of a private member, a greater influence, a greater arena for concern by private members.

A couple of examples of this are indicated by the development and growth of the committee system, albeit it has many shortcomings, many areas still to be developed. But nonetheless, the House of Commons has moved more into a greater use of committees, the examination by committees of a larger and larger number of subjects. I would think and hope we should move further in the direction of the effective and valuable use of the committees. And because there is a greater involvement by committees, and because it is a growing and developing thing—I hope there will be more effective and valuable use of committees—this carries with it a greater participation by private members because committees by and large are made up of private members, and in some cases added to by Parliamentary Secretaries.

We have also had a move recently whereby the parties, initially parties in opposition, have had made available to them grants out of the Treasury in aid of research activities so that those parties, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and others have put it, could perform their functions more effectively in Parliament. Not too many days ago, we had an announcement made by the Prime Minister that this concept of funds for research activities would be extended to include private members on the government side, again

[Mr. Howard (Skeena).]

another indication of the growth of the potential effectiveness of the House of Commons and of the private members in it, as distinct from and in contrast to the authoritarianism of cabinet and of government itself.

It is true that even with all this, under our system the Prime Minister and the cabinet still control Parliament. They still, under the party system, through the caucus structure, are able to have their way when the chips are down and the crunch is on. But that is a matter for speculation at another time. At the moment, I want to deal with the developing force in the House of Commons itself for its own sovereignty and its own activities.

The House of Commons Act under section 17—and I won't bother to read it all—points out that the Clerk of the House in so far as certain activities are concerned, and the Sergeant-at-Arms so far as certain other activities are concerned, annually prepare estimates of the expenditures necessary for the various component parts of their jurisdictions. These estimates relating to salaries, moving allowances, and the messengers, door keepers, clerks, servants of the House and the like—in other words the financial matters for the operations of the House of Commons—are prepared initially by the Clerk of the House and the Sergeant-at-Arms and are submitted to the Speaker. If one just simply looked at that process one could very easily come to the conclusion that, primarily, the Speaker is in full control of things because he is the one co-ordinating the preparation of the estimates.

But section 18 of the House of Commons Act—and I think this is worth reading, Mr. Speaker—points out that in fact the Speaker, in this regard, who is the spokesman of the House and is our representative, is not in full control of the estimates which he may prepare in the light of the desirous activities of the House itself and of extensions. Section 18 reads:

All sums of money voted by Parliament upon such estimates—

That is the estimates the Speaker prepares.

—or payable to members of the House of Commons under the Senate and House of Commons Act, are subject to the order of the commissioners, or any three of them, of whom the Speaker shall be one.

We all understand this, but in order to set it out in *Hansard* so that anyone reading it may appreciate what is involved, we have to look at section 16 to find out who these commissioners are and what they are. Section 16 gives the prerogative or right—privilege is