

*Veterans Affairs*

The reason was that the Department of Public Works was responsible for cost of land acquisition and office space for the Department of Veterans Affairs and under current policy, the cost of providing and maintaining office space would be carried in the budget of the Department of Public Works as long as the facility was required. If I do not know now, how am I going to know later? It is going to be in the budget of the Department of Public Works? I am a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs but that information is not going to be in the estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I suppose one could float between committees and maybe finally get the question to the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Buchanan). Of course, he will say that decisions are being made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald). This is the run-around we sometimes get between committees.

In any major move of this nature, we have the stated policy of government that we are going to decentralize. Surely the next move should be a study and questioning of employees. When the study has been completed in reasonable detail, the announcement can then be made based on our findings, the availability of space, the cost of moving, the availability of educational facilities and so on.

● (1742)

Let me give hon. members another example in connection with Place Guy Favreau in Montreal. We shall be spending multi-millions of dollars in the construction of this building, which is an illustration of decentralization in reverse. I asked the minister what departmental offices were scheduled to occupy space in that project. The answer was: "We cannot at this early date identify specific government offices which will be relocated into complex Guy Favreau." The answer continued:

Public Works does not to date maintain records of numbers of personnel in client premises . . . an analysis is currently under way which will recommend renegotiation of economically favourable leases and relegation of some Crown-owned properties. The allocation of space in Place Guy Favreau will be made after this analysis has taken place.

I mention this for two reasons. First, we have decided to put up a building in Montreal at a cost in excess of \$100 million before deciding who should move into it. That, Mr. Speaker, is reverse decentralization. The responsible department, the Department of Public Works, does not know what it is doing in this case because it has received no information from the other departments. So in one case the Department of Veterans Affairs passes the buck to the Department of Public Works, while in the other the Department of Public Works passes the buck to departments generally.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that I have good reason to place my motion on the order paper asking for the production of papers so that a little more light might be cast upon this whole issue. That is why I asked for the correspondence, the minutes of meetings and other communications relating to the decentralization of the Department of Veterans Affairs to the province of Prince Edward Island.

**Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough):** Mr. Speaker, long before I came to this House I was an academic and a firm believer in having before me the fullest documentation possible before arriving at a judgment on any subject. I am, therefore, in agreement with the motion. I am also much committed to the idea of freedom of information to the fullest possible extent with respect to government and government transactions.

I listened carefully to what the hon. member had to say. He intimated he was not opposed to the move to Prince Edward Island, but—it was a substantial "but" for a three-letter word. I cannot understand why he should be surprised that this proposal should be made. It is long ago since this chamber first discussed the decentralization of the administration to various parts of the country. A number of departments are already functioning from one end of the country to the other. It is past my understanding that this move to Charlottetown, the cradle of confederation, should cause so much consternation or that it should be held up as an example of inflicting pain and anguish upon public servants. I can understand that great difficulties might arise over family matters, children's education, and so on but there are not many operations in the private sector or, indeed, in the government itself where guaranteed geographical security is part of the job commitment. I never had a big business empire such as the hon. member referred to but I am wondering whether in that empire extending all across the country there are not many people who were called upon to move very suddenly from one part of Canada to another.

The move to Prince Edward Island will not take place suddenly. I hope all those concerned will be able to make suitable arrangements to provide for their families, their children and so on. But I do not accept with good grace the suggestion that Prince Edward Island is incapable of offering language training for those who will be working in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Instead of quibbling about things like this I believe this House and the country should applaud the honourable and gallant Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) who has arranged for the transfer of the department to the city of Charlottetown, a city where the per capita representation of veterans in the Boer War, the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war was very high.

It is very fitting that a minister of such great military distinction should be the man responsible for the initiation of such a move. It is conceivable that the move will be finished under another government, but those are the fortunes of political warfare. Before I leave this place I want to salute the Minister of Veterans Affairs for the action he took and say to the mover of this motion that any public servant now living in the national capital who finds that his work will take him to the city of Charlottetown is very much blessed.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Macquarrie:** His real income will not change but his psychic income will be greatly increased. I have not lived in Charlottetown for a hundred years—

**An hon. Member:** It just seems like that!