

Business of Supply

bers of the opposition, at least by some of them. This seems rather strange to me since the operation and the role of the Privy Council have been made the subject-matter of studies or reports printed and distributed to the hon. members as well as to other citizens. Their authors, very distinguished men and free of any partisanship, never lose sight of the fact that in accordance with an old rule, even the highest officials must abstain from interfering with the orders or wishes of ministers. Such a rule has always prescribed that the Privy Council must be non-partisan in nature though it must be politically considerate of the government's intentions, whatever may be the government who is enjoying the confidence of the Canadian electors. The same applies in the case of any group of officers within any department.

Despite charges from the opposition, charges to which the *Watergate* traumatism might find some credit among the people, the government has tried to lessen the restraints imposed in the past.

Since the Cabinet was appointed eight years ago, great care has also been taken to ensure that officers do not interfere with the ministers' responsibilities. It must be admitted that the Privy Council office manages the government machinery, but its officers are not responsible for the decision making process, as some believe. They perform administrative and coordinating duties from one department to another but they do not define any policy.

[*English*]

There is another very fundamental point I would like to make; that is, there is a very basic difference between the services given to the Prime Minister by the Privy Council office and that offered by his own staff. All too often, critics, either deliberately or without knowledge, blur the distinctions between two quite different operations. At one point in time a number of persons from the civil service, as I said earlier, were seconded to the prime minister from various departments to serve his staff. From the beginning of my government I have had such persons identified clearly as my political staff and put on my budget.

The operations of the Privy Council office, like the rest of the public service of Canada, are not based on partisan politics. They are certainly sensitive to public issues but they are committed to serve a government elected by Canadians, and indeed are necessary to it.

In accordance with well established prerogatives of the prime minister, I have recently nominated a new secretary to the cabinet and clerk of the Privy Council. He has been in the public service for more than 16 years, two of them as deputy minister. It is a fact that when I first came to public office he was already an assistant secretary to the cabinet. It is a fact that he is young and that I have got to know him well since I came to Ottawa. I had met him a few times previous to that, when I believe he was working for one of the ministers in Mr. Diefenbaker's government; but I have really got to know him well since coming to Ottawa and seeing him acting as assistant secretary to the cabinet. I do not see cause to discriminate against him for either of those reasons. The simple fact that he is a highly skilled civil servant should suffice to overwhelm the arguments of either his youth or of his acquaintance with me.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

An hon. Member: Is he better than all the rest?

Mr. Trudeau: The hon. member asks if he is better than all the rest. Since I have been Prime Minister, I believe I have had occasion to change every deputy minister of every department, and I have had perhaps the pleasure and privilege of presiding over a change of generation in the civil service. I think it would be difficult to say whether he is better than all the others, because the deputy ministers who are serving in the federal civil service are very competent men and women and I would be hard pressed to know by what standards the hon. member asks the question about being better. Certainly, some are more fitted for one type of job than others. I repeat that, in the case of the secretary to the cabinet, he had been an assistant secretary to the cabinet and was obviously very competent in that aspect of his job.

Having dealt with the Privy Council office, I must now deal with my own staff in the Prime Minister's office. As a preface, let me remind the committee that the Privy Council office is totally non-partisan. Its employees are the same as any employees of the public service. My dealings with them seems to indicate to me that I am fortunate to have such knowledgeable advisers. Their assignment is to produce the expertise for any government which happens to gain power.

The Prime Minister's staff, on the other hand, is admittedly a different operation. Naturally, it is completely partisan and, I hope, intelligent. I fear it has been greatly misunderstood in terms of numbers and alleged power. Almost half of the staff for whom I have answered either in the House or in order paper questions deals exclusively with my correspondence. I am talking about, in a slow year, 112,000 letters. That is more than 300 letters a day; and I believe that, if not all of them, the overwhelming majority are dealt with and dealt with well. That is half the reason for the size of the Prime Minister's office. I believe that in the days of previous prime ministers, correspondence was considerably below that and the habit of communication between citizens and their prime minister had not developed to the same extent. I believe that all who work for me produce a service of which any prime minister would be proud. I would challenge any political leader in this country to produce a staff that would have the determination to be as objective and, quite frankly, as critical as mine.

Again, I do not want to belabour the point, but as the individual man-hours of my own staff have escalated in the past few years, the amount of assistance given to all opposition parties has also escalated, as I reminded the House a few minutes ago when I quoted the figures. If the opposition is perturbed about the Prime Minister's office, perhaps it can gain some comfort in looking at the escalation of its own budget and its own responsibilities.

[*Translation*]

I want to make sure that all members understand exactly what I mean. That is why I repeat that, in the administration area, which includes government decision-making centres, our objective is to ensure that the responsibility of decision making is totally discharged by the cabinet, with the support, in the House, of a well informed caucus, of which I am proud, Mr. Speaker.