

sible minister before us only by the extraordinary procedure of bringing on this sort of debate: he came before the committee and, in a filibuster, talked for about 1½ hours, then ran away after some lead-off remarks had been made by representatives on the opposition side. He ran away. So I say there seems to have been an attempt under the system in the past to bring in everyone but parliament. It is clear that the Privy Council office is no longer a secretariat. Mr. Robertson said, on page 18 of the English version of "The Changing Role of the Privy Council Office":

As a department provides its ministers with analysis, advice and recommendations on the objectives of the department, so the Privy Council office gives the Prime Minister information, analysis and advice on the totality of policies.

So it is not just a secretariat; it is a department like others, but has considerably more power than other departments. Following the lines and the logic of Mr. Robertson, it should be subject to regular review in the same way as other departments. I would like to ask the Acting Prime Minister, if he has been briefed by Mr. Pitfield or whoever briefs him, how he proposes to have that kind of review on a regular basis without having to resort to this extraordinary situation where the Prime Minister comes in for a monologue and flees. How does he propose to have parliament review what is going on in the Privy Council office with at least the same regularity and scrutiny as is done with the Post Office?

● (1710)

I would like to serve notice of my understanding. I am very careful about this. We had an understanding that the speech by the Prime Minister would be short and that I had 15 minutes in which to place questions and receive answers. Is that correct? If not, I will list some questions.

The Deputy Chairman: The hon. member is seeking the advice of the Chair. The hon. member has 20 minutes. We are not operating under any special order, but the Standing Orders. I refer the hon. member to Standing Order 55(3) which allows him 20 minutes.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): I wonder if it would be agreeable to the committee to follow the same procedure as when the Department of Transport estimates were before the House, which allowed each member 15 minutes. I must say I was under the impression that was the case. Is that agreeable to the committee? I see heads nodding. My understanding is I will have 15 minutes, and by sitting down now to hear the acting prime minister respond I am not prevented from carrying on.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, I certainly have no objection to reverting to the kinds of procedures that were agreed to when the Minister of Transport was before the committee. As I understood those rules, there were various alternatives. An hon. member can take 15 minutes and make a speech without expecting any reply. He can make a shorter speech and have the minister reply for the rest of the 15 minutes. He could use the 15 minutes for a question and answer period, with the minister's reply being part of the 15 minutes. I am certainly prepared to go along with that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): I hope the Acting Prime Minister will not follow in the shadow too closely of the man he is replacing and will answer briefly so I will have a chance for one or two more questions.

The Deputy Chairman: Order, please. It has been suggested by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain that the rules that were applied when the Minister of Transport was before the committee be adopted for the remainder of the sitting of this committee. Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, as I understood the question put by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain, it was, what procedure should there be for a regular review of the operations of the Privy Council office? I thought that was what we were engaged upon today, and were engaged upon when the estimates were before the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates. I have some difficulty because for the most part in our discussions so far there have been general statements and not specific questions. If the hon. member has some specific questions he would like to put to me, I have some officials in front of me who are members of the staff of the Privy Council office and they can assist me in answering.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Chairman, I thought I was putting a specific question. At least for members on this side of the House this arrangement is completely unsatisfactory because in the standing committee we cannot get the responsible minister, since that is the Prime Minister. When we take the extraordinary step of coming into the House of Commons, we have a situation where the Prime Minister talks for a long time and then leaves. I think what is going on in the Privy Council and in the Prime Minister's office, according to the testimony of Mr. Gordon Robertson and others, is sufficiently important that it should be subject to at least the kind of regular review as the estimates of the Post Office.

Let me ask the acting prime minister this: As his parliamentary secretary at least will be aware, I proposed, and it came up for debate on December 9, a private member's resolution in the following language:

That, in the opinion of this House, a committee should be selected to consider the powers, prerogatives and privileges attaching to the office of Prime Minister and to report what safeguards are desirable or necessary to secure the constitutional principles of the sovereignty of parliament and the supremacy of the law.

I would be quite happy to extend that to include the Privy Council office. In light of the problem that is certainly seen from the point of view of the opposition, if there is in fact a system of responsible government, there should be some concern for the point of view of the opposition. Will the Acting Prime Minister consider establishing that kind of committee, or taking some other steps to ensure there is provision whereby parliament can regularly deal with a responsible minister on policy questions relating to the Privy Council offices without having to resort to the extraordinary procedures we have had in this case?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, I do not think these are extraordinary procedures. I know the hon. member has not been in the House very long. Perhaps I might review how