

House of Commons Act

We do not need a bureaucratic set-up in order to get our views across the Cabinet Ministers. That is a direct process. I resent having any individual as a go-between me and any Cabinet Minister to whom I want to make a proposal, and I am sure that all Members of this House feel the same way. We are here to do a job. We face this issue of personal representation and group representation all the time. I believe it should be laid clearly on the line, Mr. Speaker, that when we say "Management and Members Services"—although it sounds like a very self-serving phrase and people might get the idea that in this Committee Members of the House are serving themselves, which, of course, is totally inaccurate—we mean that Members are there to try to upgrade the services of Members of the Parliament of Canada, to give them better working conditions and to give them some staff to work with so that they can do their jobs better.

I believe the Hon. Member for Dauphin-Swan River (Mr. Lewycky) was talking about the British parliamentary system and he mentioned some of its superior philosophies and ways of operation. However, I would like to point out that that is certainly not the case when it comes to the British Member of Parliament. I have been in the office of a British Member of Parliament and it is not even as big as the one I occupy here on the Hill, which certainly is not big by ordinary standards. In that office there were four MPs and two secretaries. If there was ever a set-up for a family feud, Mr. Speaker, I imagine that was it. Each Member had to come in the office to see if the chair in the corner was vacant so that he could sit down to do some work with one of the secretaries.

• (1700)

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the British Parliament has its time well programmed. When they have a debate, they say how many speakers there will be and how many minutes each will be allowed. In order to conserve space on the floor of the office they have this little television set up in the corner fastened to the ceiling so there would be no square inches lost. From time to time that set would indicate the number of minutes left in the total debate and the number of minutes left to each speaker. In that way they know when the debate is coming to a close. They have many interesting things like this. The Hon. Member for Dauphin-Swan River (Mr. Lewycky) told me that the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Collenette) also had referred to the British Parliamentary system.

Certainly there have been improvements around here since I first came to the House. I mentioned constituency offices. Then there is the matter of equipment in our own offices, and office space. When some of us first came here, if we wanted to have a confidential conversation with a constituent or a group of constituents, or some Members came in and we had to have a private conversation, the secretary either went down to the cafeteria for a coffee or took a walk down the hall to the washroom or something because we only had one small office in which to operate.

Another difference which I would point out between our system and the British system is that in North America

generally, here and in the U.S., we are loaded down with mail and telephone calls to a far greater degree than British Members of Parliament. If we really want to compare the three systems, we have to compare the actual work load. It is important that we as Members of Parliament have good staff and are able to keep them to do the work in our offices. That means half decent working conditions, half decent pay. If we cannot get people of good calibre to handle the issues in our offices and routine things which come up during the day, then we ourselves are going to be tied up in the administrative details of our own offices to such an extent that we will not be able to be legislators. When that happens, there is only one group left to do the legislating, and that is, the executive committee of Government, namely the Cabinet.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think in all democracies we have to be able to free the representatives of the people so as to enable them to dig into what is being done by way of legislation, to make proposals for legislation and improvements in legislation, and really to be able to discuss it intelligently with their constituents. Surely that is our role. But at the same time we must look after our constituents because that is what we are here for. We can do that if we are good individual administrators as MPs, but we cannot be good administrators if we do not have the staff, equipment and techniques with which to work.

People who come to the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, are there because in one way or another—indeed in many ways—they have already become leaders in their own communities. They have a lot of respect in their own communities. Therefore, why should we not have executive representation on the internal Economy Commission? We should have good representation from the House of Commons to represent the Members of this House of all Parties who are informed about what is required by all Members of this House and who go there with the same dedication with which they go to the Committee on Management and Members' Services.

I am going to leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. This has been a long process, starting with representations on an individual basis, that first little group which met and tried to get constituency offices funded. Along the way a fairly good rapport has developed between members of the Management and Members' Services Committee and the representatives of the Commission on Internal Economy. There was a necessity for direct input on a continuing basis from Members of this House to the commissioners and a reform of the commissioners' operation itself because we have travel arrangements today that we would never have had if we did not have the opportunity to put them forward. I am going to sit down, Mr. Speaker, because I know that another Hon. Member wishes to speak.

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester): Mr. Speaker, I only have a few moments, and I just wanted, first of all to congratulate the Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) for proposing this Bill. I have had the privilege of being the Chairman of the Committee on Management and Members' Services for probably eight years now and I think,