

*House of Commons Act*

The weakness of his proposal, Mr. Speaker, lies herein that the Hon. Member failed to provide any alternatives, substitutes or replacements. During the present session, the subject was debated twice when the House considered Bill C-273, introduced by the Hon. Member opposite, the Member for Edmonton-West (Mr. Lambert), on November 6, 1981 and again on May 18, 1983. The purpose of this Bill was to replace the four members of the Privy Council who are also Members of the House of Commons by five backbenchers, who, with the Speaker, would form the Internal Economy Commission of the House of Commons.

In each debate a number of suggestions were made by Hon. Members, and I am sure that further proposals may be made this afternoon if the debate is prolonged.

However, there is unanimity on one point, and that is the need to change an administrative structure that is now obsolete and that was established when the staff and services of the House of Commons were not as numerous and Parliament was sitting only a few weeks a year so that Members were not in Ottawa for the same periods of time they are now.

● (1620)

Mr. Speaker, the concern about this matter has reached the point that in its ninth report, the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure made a concrete proposal to restructure the Internal Economy Commission, more specifically by reducing Cabinet participation and adding a number of private members. In fact, these proposals were aimed at bringing administrative decision-making closer to the members themselves.

I have neither the intention nor the time at this stage to go through all these suggestions, and there are several, although I do feel that the majority are acceptable or can at least be considered an improvement. I shall be dealing mostly with my own plan, which has one advantage in that it does not try to change everything and could be considered as a step, a kind of trial balloon that would eventually lead to further changes if Hon. Members feel they are appropriate. The reasons for my interest in this matter are many. First of all, nine years experience in the Chair brought me closer to the administrative concerns of the House in general. There is also my membership in the Advisory Council, which does not always give the impression it is very advisory and which still has no specific terms of reference, and finally, my membership on the executive of various parliamentary associations, in addition to the 21 years I spent in this institution.

I believe that lines of communication in the House of Commons have never been as poor as they are now. The general discontent is creating a situation I quite seriously would call explosive. I have never heard so many complaints and so much grumbling among Hon. Members and House of Commons staff, but nobody seems to care. The House is no longer a pleasant place to work, Mr. Speaker. I agree that

some things had to be changed, certain controls were lacking, but although these changes were well-intentioned, for many people they have become so many constraints and elements of divisiveness and oppression. A system based on favoritism has been replaced by another, more sophisticated system. It used to be that Hon. Members could discuss their problems and difficulties with the Speaker, the Clerk or the Sergeant-at-Arms, who were all part of the administrative structure of the House of Commons, where incumbents reacted quickly to complaints or representations by Hon. Members. I am told that the Clerk is no longer interested in administrative concerns, and the House is aware that the Sergeant-at-Arms has lost most of his powers. Today, the number of executive positions has been increased tremendously, and responsibility for all these people lies with the Administrator, who has no inkling of the political, social and human repercussions some of his initiatives may have, and who is waiting or hoping for the day when he himself, as is being whispered, will become Deputy Minister of the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, I believe all this is evidence of the fact that the Internal Economy Commission has become far removed from Members and the House of Commons staff in general. The Commission's members are all too busy elsewhere, and its decisions are made on the basis of information or the interpretation of the Administrator. Up to now, the Internal Economy Commission has always refused to hear Members of the Standing Committee on Management and Members' Services at one of its meetings, because the Committee is supposed to address its complaints and recommendations to the Administrator. I suggest we ask those who work night and day for the parliamentary associations what they think about the present rules on consultation and budgetary policies, which, in the final instance, will cost more because they encourage spending instead of "economy".

In any case, my proposal might have led to the same unfortunate results, but at least we would have the satisfaction of being consulted and would not have the impression which is anathema for a parliamentarian that a public servant is making most of the decisions without consultation or communication with Members. When we mention the dissatisfaction of Members to the members of the Internal Economy Commission, they run off a list of everything the Commission has done to improve services to Members, and this is all quite true, so that they feel somewhat aggrieved by our representations. I can understand that, but that is not the point, Mr. Speaker. All we want, all I want is for them to understand, and all I want the Chair to understand is that a proposal like mine is, in fact, aimed at doing away with the frustration of not being heard, not being consulted, a frustration that would not exist, or not to the same extent, if two backbenchers were to sit on the Board of Internal Economy, the Board of Commissioners of Internal Economy for the House of the Commons, as I said in my proposal. In fact, it is an administrative