

Office of Prime Minister

were dealt with by the House in committee of supply, when ministers would sit there with two officials in front of them providing information. That information did not flow to members of parliament, and members of parliament had very little input in the administration of programs. We now have the opportunity, under the existing system, to influence not only the policy but also the administration of the policy. It seems to me this is a significant thing we have acquired, obtained or won, depending on your position.

What seems clear is that the government feels it is not receiving sufficient scrutiny in the House of Commons. I think the government feels that the calibre of the opposition in examining policies and programs is not as good as it should be. I think the government feels the need for that kind of hardnosed opposition, because it is that kind of opposition which keeps the government and civil servants on their toes. This is a vital part of the way in which the government comports itself inside and outside the House of Commons.

When the opposition is digging in on various government policies it is not surprising to see changes made in their administration, and hon. members opposite, as well as backbenchers on this side, have a significant input into the way in which governing is carried on here in Canada. This seems to me to be the role of the politician. It is not part of his political role, but is part of his role as a legislator.

If we are to talk in terms of bringing the Cabinet to heel and being subject to closer examination, it seems that members opposite have to ask themselves if the opportunities now available to them are being fully exploited. If you look at those opportunities in an objective way I am sure you will find that, in fact, the existing opportunities have gone by the wayside and are not being exploited. Parliament is the master of its own fate. It has the power to effect change, and the power if required to institute different procedures in order to redress an unbalance.

● (1740)

I think one would find that backbenchers on this side of the House and the government itself would be prepared to co-operate in bringing such an undesirable thing to a happy end because we feel that the basis of the democratic system in Canada is a Parliament which is respected and looked up to, Mr. Speaker. We feel this is not now the case. We feel the prestige of the government, of the Prime Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely interesting subject that the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) has introduced. I suspect that many of us agree that it is unfortunate that there is only an hour for this debate. Of course that could be corrected if the motion of the hon. member passed and the matter were dealt with by a committee.

I believe one might also say there is more common ground between the hon. member for Rocky Mountain and the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Reid) than one might have anticipated. Both,

[Mr. Reid.]

and I agree with them, feel that we should avoid having a one-man dictatorship, an all-powerful prime minister as the one and only person running this country. I agree with the view expressed by both preceding members that perhaps the best way to make sure that we do not have a master as a prime minister of this country is to strengthen parliament itself. I regard this motion as useful in that it encourages us to think of ways in which this institution might be strengthened.

I have a number of ideas, but I shall not have an opportunity to get them all across because one must not speak for too long in this hour. First, however, I want to say there are ways in which parliament is a stronger institution today more than it was in the so-called good old days. I was here in the days of Mackenzie King. Let me tell members on all sides of this House that the word of Mackenzie King was law with respect to every last detail in the operation of this House. He did not have to ask for unanimous consent in respect of things cabinet ministers ask for such consent today. He just said that was it, and that was it!

I remember an occasion in the 1940's when I had my first experience as a member of a committee on procedure. The committee had produced what I thought was a pretty good report. It was presented, debated for a day, and then it stood for some time on the order paper. In my naiveté as a young member, I wondered what was wrong. Brazenly one day I went over to Mr. King—I knew he was the boss; he was the one to see—and asked him if he could not do something about having this report brought back for further debate. His answer to me was no, that the report proposed that the House adjourn at 10.30 at night and that we could not possibly do that. He said that we had been sitting until eleven o'clock for years, and that the report was no good. Mackenzie King did not like the suggestion that the House adjourn at 10.30, and so the report was denied.

I remember later when I dared challenge him on something he had said which was out of order. I just about got put out of the place. Here was I, a young man in my thirties, criticizing the Prime Minister! Mind you, that was a day when children were more respectful of their parents, and a day when teachers and principals ran the schools. Society has changed. Today backbenchers have a voice, and cabinet ministers and prime ministers do not rule the roost in terms of superficial details, if I may call them that.

One other factor in those days was that we did not have the sound amplification system, and many members of the House of Commons in the fourth or fifth rows did not speak during a whole session because their voices were timid and they could not be heard. Some of us who could shout and be heard thought that the introduction of the sound system was unfair because it gave an opportunity to the timid souls to be heard. Times have changed, and participation by members in all parts of the House is much more the case now than it was in the forties.

There was a similar situation in respect of the French-speaking members in those days because it was an English-speaking House, with the translation of the French appearing at the end of *Hansard*. Many times a translation did not appear at the end of *Hansard* because the French-