

Government Organization Act, 1970

compensating Members of Parliament. I could use the argument of the hon. member to observe, in philosophical terms, that hon. members should serve gratis. I am not sure that in our present context this suggestion would be a very useful one.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the attention the President of the Treasury Board has given to my observations. I was interested in his statement that there had been no in-depth study made of this matter. I hope that one of these new ministers of state or new parliamentary secretaries for whom there might not be other work, might be assigned to this interesting study.

I do not quarrel with the statement made by the President of the Treasury Board that in terms of the ordinary definition of words, "conflict of interest" and "independence of Members of Parliament" may seem to be the same thing. I want to emphasize, however, that in the context of these discussions conflict of interest usually refers to the situation where a Member of Parliament is paid an indemnity for serving the people generally and has an outside interest as a director of a company—in other words, has an interest with a profit-making organization outside Parliament. There have been studies in depth of this question and copies of such a study were tabled a year or two ago by the present Minister of National Defence who then held another portfolio.

Under the heading of "Members of Parliament" as it appears in the Senate and House of Commons Act, the reference is not to a conflict between what one does here and what one does in private business, but rather to a conflict between one's position as a person of complete independence on the floor of Parliament and yet having income given to him as an extra by the government.

I appreciate the fact that the President of the Treasury Board engaged in a bit of a philosophical discussion, as did I, but we did not end with the same conclusion. I do not take it so easily that this does not influence members on the government side of the House. I think when the government has 50 or 60 members on its pay roll in the course of a couple of years or 75 or 90 members on its payroll in the course of a Parliament, it may make the boys on that side feel a little more like supporting the government, although in their better judgment they know that they should not do so.

We shall not get anywhere on this discussion, so I would just suggest that as there has been a study of the question of conflict of interest, which is the conflict between what one does here and what one does in the private business world, there should also be a study on the independence of Parliament, making sure that there is no conflict between what one does here as a Member of Parliament and one's obligations to the government that gives the extra job.

Mr. McCleave: Mr. Chairman, I disagree with so much of what has been said on both sides that I am tempted to get into the debate this afternoon. I used to be a parliamentary secretary so I know some of the problems of that particular breed. I think parliamentary secretaries

[Mr. Drury.]

are useful if they can serve a minister without tripping over the deputy minister's cat and have a willingness to work. Some ministers can profit from having a parliamentary secretary. I was attached to an outstanding minister, the Hon. E. Davey Fulton when he was minister of public works and spokesman in this House for Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and he allowed me to work.

Looking at the other side of the House I can see that a parliamentary secretary would be very useful to the Minister of Finance, particularly if he knew anything about finance, because the minister does not. A parliamentary secretary would be useful to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, as is the present parliamentary secretary because we can ask him questions and get short answers that we understand. There are other ministers, however, to whom parliamentary secretaries would not be of much value and so I have to support the amendment because I do not think we should give this government carte blanche with regard to the number appointed.

I think this would hurt committee attendance to some degree, particularly when a parliamentary secretary has finished his term, is pushed back into the shadows and no longer has much interest in this place. This is what has happened to a few former parliamentary secretaries, despite the Prime Minister's intention to give everyone on his side a whirl at a job which provides additional pay.

I disagree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre when he says that preaching for these calls may unduly inhibit Members of Parliament. There are a few who will today for such appointments, and I have seen them do it in the past but their number is few. When the hon. member suggests that there should be some examination on the effect of conflict of interest on parliamentary secretaries, I wonder how such an examination could be carried out. Would it be done with lie detectors or some sort of instrument that could peer into whatever brains Members of Parliament have to find out what motivates them? I think this is an insult and as such is not worthy of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. In other words, I think that we as Members of Parliament are not so easily seduced.

Those members who can perform a useful function for a minister should be appointed and given an opportunity to fit into the work of the department. A parliamentary secretary can be of use. If he is not to be given some kind of authority, if he is not to be given some kind of welcome and if he is to be treated as someone the minister would rather see walking down the other side of the street, then I say to the Prime Minister, for God's sake and for the sake of the treasury, keep those parliamentary secretaries away from that type of minister. In looking at some of the ministers opposite, and quite a number of them are present this afternoon, perhaps assessing the talent that they may wish to see serving them, I say, take this seriously. I think also, Sir, that appointments of that kind should be made from both sides of the House. I know that the whip of the official opposition is in the position of a parliamentary secretary