

House of Commons Act

better understanding of the problems which regular back-benchers face who do not have a flock of assistants to deal with the various problems but who must deal with constituency and other matters.

● (1650)

I believe that if such changes were made it would be to the benefit of all Canadians and of the constituents whom we serve, regardless of political Party, because, as I mentioned, the Management and Members' Services Committee has been most non-partisan. In fact, even the Chairman has been from the Opposition. This Committee and the Public Accounts Committee are two parliamentary Committees the Chairmen of which are not Government Members. That has certainly improved that Committee's method of operation and the way it has sought to address the issues.

I hope that the Government will take cognizance of some of these matters and introduce speedy changes in that regard.

Mr. Leonard Hopkins (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to make some specific comments on this Bill. The Hon. Member who is sponsoring this Bill wishes to increase the number of commissioners of Internal Economy from five to six, and to have the membership of the Commission made up of Members of the House of Commons. The Bill further provides for delegation by the Speaker of any or all of his administrative powers under Sections 16 to 18 so that his presence would not necessarily be required for the purpose of carrying out those Sections.

My views on the specifics in the Bill, Mr. Speaker, are simply that I believe that the commissioners of Internal Economy should be made up of a mix of Privy Councillors, members of the Cabinet—because, after all, they are still responsible for the purse strings—and representatives from the House of Commons. I believe that there is a lot of evidence to prove that when an all-Party committee sits down like this to discuss matters, some useful ideas come from it. There is communication at first hand; the Opposition caucus is not coming over and lobbying Privy Councillors; the New Democratic Party is not coming over and lobbying Ministers; and Members within our own Government caucus are not lobbying committees. It is a united lobby. That demonstrates clearly what the Hon. Members of the House of Commons really need.

I do not agree with having the Speaker delegate a lot of authority which she now holds. I believe that if the system, as we have described it up to this point, were working effectively, that would not be necessary. Speakers have said in this House that they are here to serve the Members of the House of Commons. What better way can they serve, and what better way would they have of knowing how to serve, than if Hon. Members from the House of Commons were to sit down with Privy Councillors in managing the affairs and services of this House of Commons?

I do not believe that the Administrator of the House of Commons, who is a servant of this House of Commons, should be the secretary to the commissioners of Internal Economy. I believe that is a mistake. The only people who can really

represent the Hon. Members of this House of Commons on both sides of the House are the Hon. Members themselves. If representations are made from each Party caucus in the House, then it will be the responsibility of each Party caucus to advise its representative on the Internal Economy Commission precisely what his Party's position is.

I believe that whoever is Speaker in future years, as well as the present Speaker, would welcome this arrangement. It would remove a big problem from their shoulders because a consensus has already been reached when they are presented with a request from the House of Commons or with the work of the commissioners of Internal Economy.

I would like to deviate a little from the subject of the remarks I just made and go back to the time when individual Members lobbied Members of the Privy Council in order to get things done, which was a very loose and unsatisfactory arrangement. I remember one day when the Hon. Member for Terrebonne (Mr. Comtois),—who is in the House today—the present Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin), myself and one other Member met together. We had just returned from a very busy weekend in our constituencies. I personally had something like 40 phone calls and visits from people to my home on Saturday and about 30 on Sunday, and I had to come back to Ottawa on Monday morning to manage all this. Therefore, our first aim was to bring to the attention of the commissioners of Internal Economy the real need for Hon. Members to have constituency offices. Eventually, that came about. We look upon this as one of our first achievements. Out of this group, in a continued liaison with the other two Parties in the House, came the founding of the Standing Committee on Management and Members' Services, which is chaired by the Hon. Member for Cumberland-Colchester (Mr. Coates). I would like to pay him a compliment today. He does a very good job as Chairman of that Committee and he operates in such a way that I sincerely feel he has the confidence of all the members of that Committee. That is very important for a chairman to have.

The founding group has continued. Some of us have been part of the Management and Members' Services Committee from time to time, others on a continuing basis. However, I believe that this Committee serves this House very well, and it will continue to serve this House very well if it is given serious attention. I feel that the time is definitely ripe for a new tone to be set with the commissioners of Internal Economy, that Commission should be reformed that Hon. Members of the House from all Parties should sit on that Commission. I cannot think of anyone who would be more qualified to do so, Mr. Speaker, than a Party representative who comes directly from the membership of the Management and Members' Services Committee. In that Standing Committee the Hon. Members are well aware of everything that is discussed. They are well aware of all the issues which are brought to their attention and they can certainly explain things on a first hand basis to the commissioners of Internal Economy who are sitting around that table.