

*Government Orders*

then the vote would be taken on division. On that understanding the Chair was not listening for anybody saying that he or she was not prepared to go ahead.

We are now in a very difficult position. I wonder if the deputy whip of the government party has something to propose.

**Ms. Catterall:** Mr. Speaker, I am certainly prepared to accede to unanimous consent, provided the member for Vegreville displays the same courtesy to our agreement that the member for Burin—St. George's did and keeps his remarks equally brief. Otherwise we would have the position where one member was denied his speaking time. I hope he will respect that.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Chairman:** Is there unanimous consent to give the floor to the member for Végréville for a few minutes and then proceed with the vote?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*English*]

**Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the House for causing all the problem this evening. It was lack of experience on my part. Indeed I will keep my comments very brief. I will just hit on the points I was going to elaborate on in some detail.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Department of Agriculture Act to give effect to the government reorganization initiated by the previous government. For the most part it is an administrative bill. Its basic intention is to streamline and clarify the mandate of the department. Streamlining is consistent with Reform thinking but when streamlining is done there has to be a positive outcome, or at least Reformers demand a positive outcome.

In the case of the streamlining proposed in the bill there is only a very small efficiency added to the way the department operates. There is no indication at all of any cost saving, which is the other requirement of any streamlining. The bill falls far short of what any reorganizing bill should. It will not improve the efficiency of the department substantially and it will not cut the cost of operating the department.

The specific clause of the bill I would like to address again briefly is clause 7 that deals with reporting to Parliament. The bill recommends and, if it passes, will cause the reporting to Parliament to be removed. These annual reports have been around for some time.

Part III of the main estimates give more detail than the reports do in terms of how spending occurs within the department. The problem is that part III of the estimates do not give enough information to make the finances and spending of the department clear. I would propose this accounting to Parliament and

this report to Parliament should remain in the bill so that there is proper accountability.

• (1815)

This is exactly what the hon. member for Malpeque was suggesting in his amendment which was shot down by his colleagues.

I am only asking for what the hon. member for Malpeque was suggesting in his amendment and nothing more. The parliamentary secretary to the minister when addressing this issue said: "Why keep the annual reports because they were always late anyway and they had very little in them?"

That does not sound like the way to handle a situation like this. If the annual reports were of very little value then the annual reports should be presented in a more timely fashion and with enough information to make them worth while.

There are two different views on how to handle a situation like this. I believe that by making these annual reports timely and meaningful that together with the main estimates this House and the people of Canada, to whom we are responsible, would be able to understand whether the spending within the department is done in an efficient and acceptable way or not.

The only other comment that I will make now in the extended time I was given is that the main estimates do not give enough information to make the spending by this department or any other department easy to understand. As evidence of this I would challenge any member opposite to a duel at high noon tomorrow.

**Mr. Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Lib.):** I will take you on.

**Mr. Benoit:** I will ask questions about the department. I will ask questions and using part III of the estimates, the hon. member will answer the questions. I hope there will be a taker for this challenge, certainly the parliamentary secretary or the minister. I will be absolutely delighted if this challenge is accepted.

I will end my remarks saying that we will not oppose this bill although there is very little in it for us to support.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I declare the motion carried on division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)