

Government Organization

necessary, the views or recommendations of the Economic Council will have to be taken into consideration.

There are other areas—and some have been considered during the debate—many areas where federal jurisdiction is being applied in the interest of the consumer. I believe, and I say this as strongly as I can, that the present act, by regrouping under the authority of a single department or a single minister, all the legislation concerning the economy and such important acts as combines investigation, bankruptcy, patents, copyright, trade marks and companies, will allow for a constant supervision of the consumer's interest and the application of the present act will allow to co-ordinate them all with a single economic policy. As a result, an immense step forward is being taken as far as the interest of the consumer is concerned.

When we object to changing the name of the department, such objection should not, directly or indirectly be construed as government objection to legislation favouring the interest of the consumer. We have simply tried to avoid a misrepresentation of the true powers, of the actual powers if you will, vested upon the new registrar general or the minister in charge of the new department.

It is clear that if, from several angles, in some of those important areas, the responsibilities of this department are directly related to the interests of consumers, the interests of corporations and commercial and industrial concerns are also involved. Consequently, I believe that simply to call this department the department of consumer affairs, would be to a certain extent, misrepresenting the facts and the departmental jurisdiction. We thought it was simpler and more appropriate to give it a traditional name, as I say, namely that of the registrar general of Canada, who already carries out extremely important responsibilities in the administration of the nation's business.

But I do want to emphasize that the important point is to see what powers and what jurisdiction are conferred by this statute. That is where one realizes, by looking at the facts, that, to a very large extent, the government is concerned with preparing and maintaining for the future, the continued protection of the consumers' interests.

This argument applies to the change in name and it must also be used to assure everyone that, by refusing to amend clause 8 of the bill, as proposed, the government does not have, as I say, any intention which is,

[Mr. Favreau.]

even indirectly, inimical to the interests of the consumers.

Besides, one of the dangers of the proposed amendment was, among others, this reference to the question of prices. One realizes how dangerous this may be from the constitutional point of view.

● (8:20 p.m.)

[English]

The Chairman: Order. I apologize for interrupting the minister, but he is commenting on a decision that has been made.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Chairman, I must say that the minister's reply represents Liberalism at its best. He is trying to tell the committee how concerned he is about consumers, and that the reason the government cannot accept the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is not because the government is not interested, not because it is hostile toward the consumers, not because it is hostile toward doing something for them, but because three things stand in its way.

He tells us that a study must be made. This government has been in office for three years and I have noted that almost every major issue that has confronted it has been postponed because a study was under way. It has told us that it is waiting for reports, for white papers, for the results of inquiries: We are always waiting. This is a government of tomorrow; it is always going to do something tomorrow when it receives a report, completes a survey or when somebody makes up his mind as to what should be done and passes it on. It will do something, but now is never the time: Always put off till tomorrow what is facing you today. That apparently has become the slogan of this government.

The minister tells us that the Economic Council of Canada must make a report before action is taken. Surely he is aware of the fact that the Economic Council of Canada is not making a study on this question of prices but simply going to make a long-term projection as to the relationship between wages and prices. It is doing nothing by way of a thorough and definitive study into price rises and whether or not they are justified. I invite any minister here to stand up and tell me that this council is making a study into the justification of price increases.

The hon. member for Outremont-Saint Jean shakes his head.

An hon. Member: You are wrong.