

Office of Parliamentary Commissioner

[Translation]

Mr. L. J. Pigeon (Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I had suggested that I second the motion. Therefore, I wonder why you did not follow my suggestion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will agree that he is raising the point rather late, as I had already recognized the hon. member for Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare (Mr. Armstrong).

Mr. Pigeon: But I did say "seconded by Pigeon".

[Text]

Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in.

DIVORCE**MEASURE TO MODERNIZE DISSOLUTION AND ANNULMENT OF MARRIAGE**

On the order: Public bills:

Second reading of Bill C-5, an act to provide in Canada for the dissolution and the annulment of marriage—Mr. Peters.

Mr. Knowles: Stand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Stand at the request of the government.

[Translation]

Mr. L. J. Pigeon (Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, I realize that it is a little late perhaps to rise on a point of order, but I wish to call your attention to the fact that although we asked for a French version of Bill S-2 moved by the hon. member for St. Maurice-Lafleche (Mr. Chretien), I have just been informed that there are no French copies of that bill. I wonder what the government means by full bilingualism?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am informed that the French version of the amendments appear on page 96 of the *Votes and Proceedings* of March 13.

Mr. Pigeon: Mr. Speaker, when a bill comes back to this house after amendments have been moved at the other place, is it not usual to have the bill printed in both languages?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it is not.

[Text]

PUBLIC SERVICE**MEASURE TO ESTABLISH OFFICE OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER**

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer) moved the second reading of Bill No. C-7, to establish the office of parliamentary commissioner.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill to establish the office of a parliamentary commissioner is basically the same as the bill presented last year under the number of C-19 and which was disallowed by Your Honour because it incurred the expenditure of public funds. It is also similar to a bill presented the year before known as Bill No. C-98. The adjustments which have been made to this bill, Bill No. C-7, are such that there can be no question about its demanding the expenditure of public money.

My reasons for introducing this bill are twofold. First of all, I am personally familiar with the working of the Scandinavian ombudsman which has operated in Sweden for 150 years, and I have likewise had the opportunity of studying the operations of the New Zealand ombudsman. In fact, it is my privilege to know the New Zealand ombudsman personally. I am convinced of the value of such an office and believe that we urgently need such a set-up in Canada.

Second, the tremendous expansion of administrative authority, giving vast power to the executive side of government, has resulted in an ever increasing number of tribunals and agencies carrying with them authority over the person or property of the private citizen. As a result, citizens very often having legitimate complaints regarding administrative injustices too often find themselves unable to speak out about them. The courts in Canada are no longer the bulwark of individual rights, since much of the common law has lost its flexibility. The office of ombudsman is intended to be the protector of such individual rights. He may be called, in English, as we have entitled him in this bill, a parliamentary commissioner, although actually his responsibilities are those of a public defender.

It is evident to me that the existing protection of the average citizen against executive power is rapidly becoming inadequate. In my opinion such an office would keep watch over the way in which government officials apply the laws and regulations to the public, and would investigate the complaints of private citizens against such officials. He would not have power to overrule, but would be in a strong position to suggest that injustices be corrected. He would report directly to parliament annually. When this report is presented to parliament, the session of the parliamentary committee concerned would be open to all persons, private and public. Actually the status of an ombudsman, or parliamentary commissioner, would be that of a high court judge and would have the powers of a commissioner under the Inquiries Act.