

Government Organization Act, 1970

The authorities, of course, always refer to the principle of the bill on second reading. Presumably, one could argue that the over-all principle of this bill is to ask the House to approve a scheme of improved organization of government. That would be the single principle, but there are other principles as well. Mr. Speaker Michener did rule on this point at one time when he was confronted with a bill which made him ask the question, can a bill which raises several principles, come before the House for second reading. I recall very clearly the ruling but I have not had an opportunity to find it. He ruled that on second reading the House could indeed be involved with a bill which contained one or several principles. I would argue that this ruling is relevant here if my hon. friend's argument that there must be one principle and one proposition is to be pressed. I think that both precedent and that particular ruling would assist in clarifying the point.

I shall conclude by saying that the House, in looking at this bill on second reading, presumably must balance the principles and consider whether those principles each hon. member can support are more important than those he may not be able to support. In other words, we would have to be guided by that consideration as we all are in looking at any bill. An hon. member could give support over-all to the bill on second reading and then, when it reaches the committee of the whole stage, he would have an opportunity to say yes or no to each particular proposition. The House is not at any particular point being denied an opportunity to judge every single proposition in the bill, because that is the purpose of the committee stage. Hon. members will be able to determine their attitude in respect of the Department of the Environment, in respect of the Ministries and the Ministers of State and in respect of the Public Service Superannuation and they can say yes or no. So, no opportunity is denied members to decide on each of these so-called propositions.

I shall simply summarize, Mr. Speaker, by saying the over-all theme or over-all principle of the bill is the improved organization of the government and that each of these so-called propositions is directed to that policy objective. In the past, we have had bills which have included changes in various departments. We have had bills which included various propositions. Indeed, we have a ruling of Mr. Speaker Michener that on second reading the House could be asked to deal with a bill which contained several principles. Finally, the members of the House will be given an opportunity to say yes or no to each of the so-called propositions when each clause is called during the committee of the whole stage.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to commend the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) for raising this point of order. It is one to which I believe Your Honour will have to give very serious consideration. I shall not have the time of the House to produce all the citations, partly because I do not have them in front of me and partly because I am sure I produced them all in the debate

[Mr. MacEachen.]

which led to the ruling of Mr. Speaker Macnaughton to which reference has already been made. At the outset I may say, in terms of dealing with precedents, that there is one difficulty we have in that the ruling of Mr. Speaker Macnaughton was in respect of a resolution, whereas this is in respect of the second reading of a bill. I admit that before we start. However, I believe the principle which has been enunciated by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants still stands, namely, that Parliament should have the right to make a decision on a principle standing by itself.

I should like to answer directly the main argument used by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen). Before doing so, may I say that the reply of the President of the Privy Council to this point demonstrates how serious the matter is. The Government House Leader says we have often done this. He pointed out that a while ago we had before us a bill which amended three loans acts and that on various occasions we have had before us what are called omnibus bills. This is exactly the point. This is the reason I believe it is exceedingly important that this point of order has been raised at this time. In this bill I believe we have a glaring example of how far a government can go when it starts to operate under the umbrella of an omnibus bill. This bill not only has the nine or 10 parts, each of which is separate from the other, but also has schedules and in some of the items in the schedules there is not just a list of departments which have been moved around but actual amendments to statutes which are not referred to in any of the nine parts of the bill itself.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one must not place ideas in the government's head because those ideas might be picked up. However, it is not a very giant step from this to one bill which would include the work of the whole session. The government could bring us here and while we were debating the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne a huge omnibus bill could be brought in for the improvement of life in Canada. There would be about 14 parts in the bill covering the many things the government had in mind, as well as a schedule containing all the little details, and before we knew it we would have the work of a complete session introduced in one bill. Perhaps I am carrying this a little far, but of course one does this in making a point, and with this government even the absurd is not impossible. So, I say that in terms of the operation of Parliament this point of order is very important. How far can a government go in combining a host of different subjects into one bill and ask Parliament to vote on them en bloc without any regard for the individual points?

● (3:20 p.m.)

Now Sir, the chief argument that the President of the Privy Council used to try to offset the case made by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants was that the House is not being denied the right to make a decision on each of the individual parts of the bill. I challenge that statement. The Committee of the Whole may have the chance to make a decision by a standing vote which is not recorded—no names are put down—on each individual