

Government Organization

The Deputy Chairman: Shall the amendment carry?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Mr. Chairman, I feel there is some confusion in all this. Many times I have heard it said in this house that this legislation will give huge powers to the minister and that the house must be protected, not necessarily against the present minister, but anyone who can abuse those powers. Anyone who reads the bill carefully will notice the powers are not given to the minister, but to the Governor in Council. This is where the powers lie. Every decision must be ratified by the Governor in Council.

All the arguments which are based on having something accepted because of special powers of the ministers, I do not think are good arguments because the minister does not have those special powers. I think under the present rules the estimates have to be referred to a committee and the type of discussion mentioned by the hon. member for Egmont could take place there. Therefore, the problem is not to try to hide anything from the house, because the house already has all the means to control what is going on in this department. First, there is the control of the Governor in Council and then there is the control of the house. My main argument is that I do not like the idea of having a standing committee of the house created to deal with a particular piece of departmental legislation. I believe it is the function of the house itself, in accordance with the rules, to establish such a committee if the house feels such a committee should be established. I do not believe this should be done through a piece of departmental legislation. I think that would be bad procedure.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): I still agree in principle with what has been said. I think this department must be controlled like all others. I believe members of this house at least at the beginning will have to be careful, but we have everything under control in the department. I do not think the house is in danger of being cheated by the minister or even by the department. I am entirely in agreement with the objectives. If the house is not satisfied with the discussions when the estimates are referred to the committee, then the house can always create a committee of the nature and kind suggested in the motion. This is the reason I am opposed to the amendment.

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Chairman, one of the most important reasons perhaps for considering this important committee, along with the arguments I advanced, lies in the importance of the subject matter with which the Committee would deal. While the minister might suggest that normally a standing committee is not established in legislation setting up a department, that course may be necessary if we are to have this problem settled. If the government and the house are not prepared to do this, then we should pack it up now and go back to what we had because it is likely that it will be as good as anything we will see in the next four or five years. I think there must be engagement at all levels in the government structure if we are to get at the problem which has been so chronic that no amount of goodwill has been able to settle it.

The minister suggested it is the function of the house to set up a committee which it feels it needs. That is all well and good. We all know that committees are or are not set up at the wishes of the government in power. When the government sees fit, and sees no great problem for itself in having a matter fully aired, it will allow the committee to go ahead with its responsibilities. When, however, there are questions which it would not like to see raised it can use the device employed by all governments and not refer the estimates or not establish the committee. Despite what the minister said to the effect that he is not engaged with any special powers, we would certainly hope he is being given some special responsibility or else we will not really get beyond what has existed with previous ministers.

● (10:10 p.m.)

I do not see how, on the one hand, he can say he is not to be given any special responsibility and, on the other hand, say this attempt will go farther than the previous ones. I do not think he can have it both ways. The minister is going to make many decisions that will be important. If the house expects him to exercise these special kinds of responsibilities through his department, then, if I may say so, it is a little bit fraudulent not to believe that the house itself has some responsibility. I do not deny the good will of the minister. I do not deny that he agrees with my suggestion, with the exception of the way it is stated. I do not think that his good will is sufficient when it is important to this house