

Government Organization

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, I would rather have the bill go down because of an incorrect amendment than have it talked out.

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure this is the reason it is not being put to a vote but in any event the hour assigned to the consideration of this matter has expired.

Mr. Irvine: Mr. Speaker, could we invite some other hon. member to move the amendment, because it is an interesting one?

Mr. Speaker: I was going to suggest that even if it were moved by someone else we would have difficulty because it would be a substantive motion to have it referred to a standing committee and would require 48 hours' notice. The difficulty might be surmounted if there were unanimous consent, but in any event the hour reserved for private members' business now has expired.

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION**PROVISION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW DEPARTMENTS**

The house resumed consideration in committee of Bill No. C-178, respecting the organization of the government of Canada and matters related or incidental thereto—Mr. Pearson—Mr. Batten in the chair.

On clause 6—*Department of the Registrar General established.*

● (7:00 p.m.)

Mr. Saltzman: Mr. Chairman, it is not my intention to take up much of the time of the committee tonight. However, I should like to make two points regarding the formation of a consumers department. Some question has been raised regarding the constitutionality of such a department and the role of the federal government in the affairs of consumers. I for one would be the last to minimize the difficulties involved in the establishment of such a department. However, I think there are many things that could be done by the federal government in this area and I want briefly to indicate some of them.

I introduced a private members bill calling for the establishment of a prices review board in which I asked for an amendment to the Combines Investigation Act which would give the administration the power to cause an inquiry to be made in respect of any increase in the price of a commodity, with a view to determining whether the increase in the cost of materials and labour warranted the imposition of such a price increase on the public.

[Mr. Speaker.]

I believe such an amendment would be in order, but I am not sure that one would be necessary in view of the powers now contained in the Combines Investigation Act. The MacQuarrie committee report of 1951 recommended that the department be divided into two sections. It specifically recommended that the powers of investigation and research be strengthened in order to get rid of the cops and robbers attitude, and to provide more information to the public and the government in terms of the economic implications of what is taking place in Canada.

In consideration of what a consumers department might do, I think the most important function would be that of supplying information after investigation. I am not sure that the envisaged department should have the power of enforcement, because I think if the consumer is sufficiently informed after an extensive investigation into economic situations he will probably be in a position to take the situation in hand.

One of the greatest difficulties in obtaining justice for consumers relates to the dispensing of publicity, keeping the consumer informed. Some very good moves have been made in this direction, but a consumers bureau could do much more to ensure that this type of information is made available to the public. In this regard I should like to quote from *Hansard* of May 8, 1923 at page 2605. At that time Mr. Mackenzie King was dealing with the question of providing information to the public, and pointed out the importance of keeping the public informed. He said:

What is the power of the Criminal Code to prosecute some particular person or group of persons in comparison with the power of spreading broadcast throughout the land accurate and true information with regard to a situation which is inimical to the public interest, and which the people themselves are certain to be concerned in remedying.

That statement was made quite some time ago and I think there has been a tendency since then to forget this great truth. If the public is to make intelligent decisions it must have information at its disposal, and it is our hope that a consumers bureau could supply this kind of information.

Some work of this nature is being done at this time. Just recently I saw a booklet published by the food and drug directorate. That was an excellent booklet and is a step in the right direction, but we need far more of this sort of thing. We must have a department to make sure that information of this kind is published in respect of consumer