

Government Organization Act, 1970

An hon. Member: It's the first time.

Mr. Drury: I would be pleased if hon. members would do the same.

Mr. Speaker: Order please. I apologize to the minister; I should have brought to the attention of the House that if the minister speaks now, he will close the debate.

Mr. Drury: I think it might be useful, before the government organization bill goes to committee of the whole for examination, if I reviewed some of the principal issues which have been raised, in the hope that I will be able to answer some of the questions of principle involved and clear up some of the misunderstandings about what is admittedly a complex bill. In this way I hope the discussion in committee of the whole will be facilitated for all concerned. I do not intend to go into detail in my remarks because there will be ample opportunity to consider the details of the bill in committee of the whole.

It will be recalled that at the outset of this debate some hon. members wondered whether it was correct procedure to include in one bill several matters of principle. After some discussion, Your Honour ruled that there was no procedural impropriety in the introduction of Bill C-207. I clearly do not want to open the issue on which Your Honour made a ruling, but I think I should explain the view of the government on the need and desirability of government organization bills. Adjustments in the machinery of government have been considerably more frequent in the past ten years than in bygone years, because of the accelerated rate at which demands upon the government have grown. In moving second reading of Bill C-207 I explained that as demands on the government have grown, new responsibilities have had to be tagged on to ministers already overloaded, and transfers of powers and elements of the public service have had to be made in a patchwork manner in an attempt to keep up with these demands.

The introduction of bills relating to the organization of government has not only permitted new adjustments in the machinery of government but also a consolidation of many of the adjustments which had to be made on an urgent basis to meet demands at an earlier time and requiring immediate action. Government organization bills, therefore, provide Parliament with a broad and unique perspective of the nature and scope of many of the issues relating to the function of the machinery of government that cannot be provided if organizational measures are introduced on a piecemeal or single-thought basis. There is also the related consideration that certain statutes such as the Salaries Act and the Financial Administration Act generally have to be amended in the course of reorganization of government. The amendment of these statutes often relates, as it does in the case of Bill C-207, to several parts of the bill, hence the logic of bringing them together in a single bill.

No government organization bill is a complete picture of all the implications of changes in the machinery of government, but it gives a much clearer picture than if the government were to submit for the approval of Par-

[Mr. Drury.]

liament individual proposals for changing the organization of government. Of course, this may have to be done from time to time, but in such circumstances Parliament cannot be given as clear a view of the context of these changes as when a government organization bill is introduced. I will come back to this point later.

Several hon. members said they could see no connection between the provisions of Bill C-207 relating to the early retirement of public servants and to government organization. However, in my view perhaps nothing is more important for proper functioning in respect of government organization than good personnel and, hence, good personnel policies. The provision in the government organization bill pertaining to early retirement is an important basis for personnel policy consistent with trends elsewhere in Canada.

Before making a few brief comments on questions that were raised regarding the establishment of a department of the environment, I wish to commend hon. members who spoke on this part of the bill for the insight and understanding they displayed on the problems of environmental quality and pollution. I was particularly impressed with the observations of several members. In the final analysis, the quality of our environment will depend upon the values of our society. If our society is to be characterized by high consumption and the consequent creation of uncontrolled and vast amounts of waste, a lack of concern for aesthetics, and so on, we will never effectively come to grips with the fight against pollution and the fight for preservation of our environment. However, from an organizational point of view the implication of this observation is that in the final analysis a minister of the environment must be concerned with the quality of life. There is no doubt he will share this concern with us all. This gets to the essence of the question.

Every minister, and indeed all of us, must be concerned about the quality of life and the condition of our environment. However, the government organization bill provides that one minister will have, in addition to having specific responsibilities relating to renewable resources, air, soil and water, a general watching brief on the quality of our environment. He will naturally be concerned, for example, if oil from ships pollutes our waters. But it will not necessarily be his responsibility to lay down specifications for the construction of ships and for rules regarding their navigation so as to avoid oil spills. This is appropriately a responsibility of the Minister of Transport. In other words, the department of the environment, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) pointed out to this House some months ago, will not be a superagency with all the operating responsibilities relating to environmental quality and pollution control which are the proper concern of the government of Canada. It will, however, provide the focal point for environmental policy.

● (9:20 p.m.)

Hon. members have proposed that the administration of our national parks and other activities related to environmental concern should be made the responsibility of