

Office of Parliamentary Commissioner

given by the government to instituting a measure of this kind, either now or some time in the immediate future.

Mr. R. W. Prittie (Burnaby-Richmond): Mr. Speaker, the members of this party are in agreement with the principle of the bill. At our party convention in Regina last summer we adopted a resolution along these lines, and I would remind the house that the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher) has a resolution dealing with the same subject on the order paper, and which will come up for discussion later this session.

It is almost trite to say that the government has become very big, but this is necessary in a complex society. Not only has the government become big, but private companies and corporations have also grown very large. We sometimes hear the words "bureaucracy" and "bureaucrat" used in a derogatory sense, but this is something we cannot get away from, because the complex society in which we live demands this bigness.

A bill similar to this one was introduced by a private member in the British Columbia legislature but was rejected. I noted that when the attorney general of British Columbia spoke on that bill he said no ombudsman was necessary in the province because every elected member of the legislature was an ombudsman. But quite apart from the problem created by the lapse of time, such as was mentioned by the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt), other problems arise. For example, in the British Columbia legislature they do not have an oral question period on orders of the day. That method of questioning ministers is not open to the members, and further, the ministers quite frequently do not answer the questions which are placed on the order paper. This can happen here also. We do have the opportunity to put questions on the order paper but ministers are not required to answer and many of them die on the order paper at the end of the session. Therefore there are certain obstacles to the effectiveness of members of this house or members of a provincial legislature acting as ombudsmen.

I think we all sympathize with the points of view put forward by the hon. member for Oxford, but I imagine that even if we had two or three ombudsmen we, as private members, should still get letters of complaint and would have to spend a certain amount of time dealing with the complaints in them.

A few cases have come to my attention which I think show the need for an ombudsman, or someone with special powers, to investigate government departments. One constituent of mine has a complaint which goes back over seven years. There is only

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

a matter of some \$70 involved, but his feeling of injustice is so great that he refuses to give up his efforts to seek redress.

When this man was on a visit in the United States he called the office of the Canadian consul and made an inquiry regarding the entry of a certain item free of duty into Canada. He was informed it could be brought in free of duty and acted accordingly, but when he arrived at the border crossing point he was told it was not duty free and he had to pay about \$70. Since he did what he considered was the right thing in calling the representative of the Canadian government, and in acting on the answer he got, he feels very strongly about the matter.

During the past six or seven years he has written to the successive ministers of national revenue and ministers of justice, but all to no avail. I have tried to help him all I can, and I think it is a very bad thing that this citizen carries this strong feeling of injustice, because he is absolutely certain he did the right thing.

It seems to me that a person who would be a parliamentary commissioner or an ombudsman would have to have some special powers. In the case I have mentioned, the customs official at the border was acting within the law. The item was not free of customs duty and the official was required to collect the duty, but the fact is that the Canadian representative in the United States gave the wrong information. I think that a parliamentary commissioner ought to be able to make an order stipulating that the amount of money involved should be refunded, if he is satisfied that the citizen in question has made a good case.

If this bill is not adopted today, and there is always that danger during this hour, there will be an opportunity later this session to discuss the resolution proposed by the hon. member for Port Arthur. I hope the government will take into account the growing demands throughout the country for the provision of such an office. It has been mentioned by the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) that the office of ombudsman is working satisfactorily in Sweden and New Zealand. He also mentioned that Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia are discussing the creation of such an office. I hope all provinces will, and especially the province of British Columbia where, with the government we have there, we would need about six ombudsmen.

Hon. J. Watson MacNaught (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys (Mr.