

*Government Organization*

of problems in this country. I think the final responsibility lies with the cabinet and I hope it will remain there. In fact, I hope we never get to the stage when we have a super authority giving directives to other departments. That power must remain with the cabinet which is responsible to parliament.

There is some contradiction in the suggestion by the hon. member for York South. He seems to build his argument on the basis that as modern society develops and becomes more complex it is difficult and perhaps impossible not only for the Prime Minister but even for other ministers to appreciate completely all that is required to cope with this development. Then the hon. member turns around and suggests that a certain department should be created to oversee such development. That, I think, is contradictory.

I am not drawing this parallel for derogatory purposes, but other nations have tried this kind of planning, this kind of centralized control, if you like, and they have failed. This system has not given the people the volume of goods and services necessary to raise standards of living.

● (5:20 p.m.)

This sort of planning fails because other levels in the economic structure object to it. This is one point on which we in this party completely disagree with the hon. member for York South.

There is one area where we feel there is real need for government concern. I have in mind the protection of consumers, and here we are in agreement with the attitude taken by the hon. member. Of the mail coming to me as a member of parliament the proportion concerned with consumer matters, price increases, credit problems and the like is larger than I have ever experienced. I presume this concern is similarly reflected in the mail received by hon. members representing constituencies in all parts of Canada. This being the case, the government should have been keenly aware of the situation and borne it in mind in its plans for reorganization. Nevertheless there is nothing in the bill to indicate that the matter has been even considered. There was little or nothing in the Prime Minister's statement to show that serious consideration was ever given to the introduction of legislation in the interest of consumers.

Whether a department of consumer affairs is necessary, I do not know. In one area, that of combines investigation, the administration

[Mr. Olson.]

has not been satisfactory. Whenever there has been a significant rise in the cost of living there have been complaints in the house that the federal government through its agency has not looked closely enough at the reasons for these price increases in an attempt to find out whether or not they were justified. Looking at company reports we find there have been significant increases in profits recently. I am not against profits. But I am against agreements which remove competition between companies. If this has been going on or if there have been indications of this practice, the federal government should be doing something about it. But there is no indication either in the bill or in the statement which the Prime Minister made that the government has given the subject any attention.

A number of abuses have come to light in connection with consumer credit. I suggest that increasingly every year in all walks of life Canadians are getting into difficulty because of conditional sales and consumer credit. I did not expect that measures to deal with this situation would be set out in the bill, but I did hope that the government would have indicated concern. It is true that a joint committee has been set up with the Senate to inquire into this subject and I suppose that within a short time the committee will be making a report with recommendations to this house and to the other place. This bill does not indicate which department would have the responsibility for implementing any such recommendations. The matter is not one which should be ignored when a new government organization is considered. It is too serious for that; it has assumed crisis proportions.

I shall not continue much longer. One could examine each of the new ministries, criticize some of the transfers and so on. The Prime Minister has told us that this is only the first step, that there will be other changes under the act dealing with the transfer of duties. The leader of our party suggested on May 9 that one important change which could be made would be to appoint two categories of ministers. This has been done in other countries, certainly in the United Kingdom, and I believe the system is effective in dealing with the growing complexities of modern society. Here again we agree with the hon. member for York South.

I would point out that probably the largest department in government today, the Department of Transport, is not to be divided. If