

*Government Orders*

now be part of a single department, the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

The primary objective of this bill is obviously to implement an organizational restructure. It is simply a musical chair exercise to reduce, in the months to come and according to what we were told, the number of civil servants from 18,000 down to 14,000. In other words, the government wants to eliminate some 4,000 jobs in the public service and offer essentially the same services.

From that perspective, the bill is not without merit. If the government can reduce the number of civil servants and still provide the same quality of service, particularly in the current context of excessive government spending, debt and deficit, then it must do it.

The problem is that this legislation does not go far enough. It could go a lot further toward improving the operations of the Department of Public Works and Government Services. It is very unfortunate to stop short of doing that, because the hon. member said the following.

[English]

"It is another initiative to revitalize. This is not mere housekeeping. This is job creation. This is an incentive approach. This is government in action, with clout, based on simplicity". It is a lot of mere words that we hear from the government. Basically it is housekeeping. These are a lot of empty words because there is no revitalization whatsoever.

As a matter of fact the law that is being proposed is discouraging to some extent because it does not address itself to the real problems that concern the Ministry of Public Works and Government Services. I am not surprised because the government really does not have the backbone to act where action is needed.

[Translation]

The fact is that except for a musical chair exercise, a grouping together of various services, this housekeeping bill does not include anything very exciting for anyone. Even though we are told that this is the first major change since that legislation was drafted in 1867, the bill still does not introduce anything new.

In fact, civil servants to whom we had an opportunity to talk have insisted that they did everything in their power to ensure that no new provisions were included. The various related acts were grouped together and great care was taken to make sure that nothing was changed. The exercise was conducted as though it was important not to affect existing structures.

This is precisely why Bill C-52 is such a disappointment. There is nothing new in this bill to improve the performance of that department, to reduce waste, or to eliminate abuse. Yet, changes or improvements to the Department of Public Works

and Government Services are long overdue. We all know that this department is often accused of wasting public money.

Mr. Speaker, you and all the hon. members in this House, not to mention the public watching us on television, are aware of specific instances of waste in government, which can hurt because it is taxpayers' money being wasted. This waste and this abuse are often linked to the Department of Public Works and Government Services or directly or indirectly. The reason is obvious. As my hon. colleague said earlier, the department spends a lot of money in Canada, grants something like 175,000 contracts each year and has hundreds of thousands of civil servants and thousands of construction and service contracts to look after. In the past, the department has wasted a lot of money and significantly contributed to increasing the government debt.

• (1040)

The public also knows full well that this department is the major channel for government into patronage. Without going into too much detail, how else would the government manage to award construction or service contracts to its friends and supporters who poured funds into its war chest? In fact, we saw again this week to what length government members are ready to go to leave the door wide open for unlimited corporate contributions.

We on this side of the House have tried to limit contributions to campaign funds to a minimum and to enforce throughout Canada an act limiting contributions similar to the legislation in force in the province of Quebec, which is quite reasonable and much more democratic and helps to reduce abuses and patronage.

Again this week the government voted in favour of an act which does not limit donations from large corporations in Canada. Once the party these companies have financially supported is in office, the companies want their share of the contracts, hence the problem. Such undue influence can be seen particularly in the Department of Public Works and Government Services. What is disappointing unfortunately is that Bill C-52 in no way addresses these issues which are vitally important in Canada, since, as everyone knows, our country is faced with some serious debts.

Nor does the bill contain provisions to curb lobbying, another big concern for Canadians. We know how lobbyists have control over the contracting process when big government contracts are involved. But then, for God's sake, with Bill C-52, why does the government not take the opportunity to deal with some major public concerns, like waste, patronage and lobbying? Nothing in this bill addresses these issues. In fact, this legislation does nothing to improve openness in the allocation of contracts for the Department of Public Works and Government Services, for telecommunications or for translation. That is the main problem