

member might wait just a few seconds. The latest report is that things are now under control.

[Translation]

Mr. Frenette: The French interpreting system is now operating properly, Mr. Speaker.

[Text]

Mr. Nesbitt: I am glad to hear that, Your Honour.

One thing that is particularly important is the fact that at the moment if the ordinary citizen feels aggrieved by some administrative act of government, he or she does not know to whom to go. Reference was made to this fact in another debate by the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken), and I think his remarks in that regard are worthy of attention. In large metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, this government has a number of offices to which a person can go, not necessarily with regard to complaints, but to secure information. In the smaller cities and rural areas, the only person to whom a citizen can turn is the member of parliament. The citizen often tries to find out from a member how to do certain things such as fill forms for old age pensions, and the like.

However, when it comes to a complaint, about which we are particularly concerned at this time, even in the metropolitan areas there is no one to whom the ordinary citizens can go except the member of parliament. After the member of parliament gets the complaints, he can go to the government offices in Ottawa and ask for redress. There may or may not be redress depending upon the caprice or whim, in most cases, of a senior civil servant or the minister concerned, if the minister has any discretion at all. Many of our regulations are so rigid that there is no discretion. I know it can be argued that it is not wise to give a minister or deputy minister too much discretion because it might be exercised in a political way. I would agree that there is some merit in that argument. On the other hand, if no discretion at all is granted, citizens of our country are often exposed to all sorts of arbitrary, heartless and even thoughtless penalties which are not necessary.

As has been pointed out, other countries have introduced remedies for this situation. I refer to countries like the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand. I think it would be an excellent thing if this institution were brought into effect in Canada.

Another thing which I feel is important is the fact that since the only avenue for any redress of an administrative wrong is a

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member of parliament, this certainly interferes with the duties of a member of parliament. As I understand it, a member of parliament was never intended to be a sort of service club, welfare officer and the like. This is what a member of parliament has become because citizens have no other way of bringing their complaints to the foot of the throne, so to speak. Perhaps one of the reasons for a great deal of criticism of the parliamentary system in the last few years is the fact that about 40 per cent of a member's time is taken up in dealing with individual problems and grievances. I have spoken to many of my colleagues and I know they spend a great deal of time doing this work because there is no other person to do it. As a result, a member is severely restricted in using time which should be properly spent on legislative matters, and other matters which are really the proper concern of a member of parliament.

I feel that many members of parliament do not get the proper amount of time to do some of our homework for committees and in many other fields, which is our proper function. This office of ombudsman or commissioner, whatever you might want to call it, would be a great help to the institution of parliament.

I do not want to take up too much time as I know others wish to speak on this subject, but in conclusion I want to give an example of the type of arbitrary behaviour which can take place and which I am sure an ombudsman would remedy. I referred to this example previously, and I think it is a particularly good one.

In my city of Woodstock, Ontario, an elderly lady fell down the post office steps and injured herself. A representative of the department concerned, the Department of Public Works, came to her and admitted the steps were slippery. He told her to sign a paper and that she would receive consideration for her complaint. She signed the paper in good faith, believing she would receive redress of some sort.

When I brought up the matter with the department we were told, in a very cold letter, that since the lady had not properly laid her complaint within seven days with the Attorney General of Canada she was out of luck. This is a good example of where an official at a fairly low level in a department enticed somebody into signing a statement which barred that person from further complaint, and I believe this is one of the things which an ombudsman could help redress. I hope every consideration will be