

*Government Organization*

made on May 9 make it clear that in some cases it would be useful for me to say a word or two about where one department's responsibility ends and another begins.

• (3:30 p.m.)

There are two groups which were of particular concern and which may have led to some confusion in the minds of hon. members. The first is the relationship between the Department of Justice, the Department of the Solicitor General and the department of the registrar general. Let me say immediately that of the three the first I have mentioned, the Department of Justice, remains the principal law department of the crown. I hasten to assure the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) on that point. I would go further and say that I entirely share his and other hon. member's great respect for and belief in what the hon. member for Greenwood called—and I quote from his statement the other day—"the fundamentally important function of the Minister of Justice, as the chief law officer of the crown, to give advice on constitutional matters, and to have responsibility for defending the federal rights in the courts." That remains the responsibility of the Minister of Justice. At the same time I would like to underline for hon. members what the hon. member for Greenwood also said that day. The first quotation was from page 4910 of *Hansard*, and the hon. member also said as reported at page 4911:

—they have been overburdened.

The hon. member was referring to previous ministers of justice. He went on:

They were responsible for advising on all sorts of legal matters. They were responsible for constitutional issues and for law reform. They were responsible to some extent for correctional institutions, and all sorts of other subjects.

Knowing this, and valuing as highly as we do the function of the chief law officer of the crown as counsel and as legislative adviser, we have in this legislation sought to free him, for this fundamentally important function, from certain administrative and operational responsibilities. Certain of these, as was pointed out the other day, will now become the concern of the Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell). It is, I believe, entirely in accord with good administrative procedure and good democratic practice that we should make these changes in this way, and in doing so we are here following a course pioneered many years ago in the United Kingdom in the Home Office.

[Mr. Pearson.]

Certain responsibilities which are also of an operational nature will go from the Department of Justice to the new department of the registrar general. I mentioned this in passing the other day. No member of the house conscious of the interplay between law and economics will fail to understand the significance of this new department and the important role it can play in areas such as patents, combines, bankruptcy and corporations, which have been left too long separated, almost in isolation. But in all these matters there is a common link of commercial interest, and legislation dealing with them will therefore have a strong economic foundation; it will contain vital elements of concern to the public interest.

I feel that bringing these matters together under one new department, with a single minister to have responsibility for them, will have effective results which could not be so easily or effectively achieved under the old, haphazard and virtually accidental arrangements by which these matters were split under two or three departments.

In this connection I have asked the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Favreau) to act also as registrar general. During the past few months he has already had responsibility for some of the pieces of legislation which will go now to the new department if this bill secures parliamentary approval. His previous experience as a member of the restrictive trade practices commission, a member of a royal commission looking into patents and copyrights, a civil servant, in private practice, and as a minister will, I believe, be of very great assistance in the formation and conduct of this department.

One of the matters which will have to be considered early in the establishment of the department of the registrar general is to what extent it can further assist and protect the Canadian consumer, which is a matter that was mentioned in the discussion on the resolution, especially by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis). The Department of Trade and Commerce, the Department of National Health and Welfare and the Department of Agriculture now have active consumer protection roles within their own departmental areas of responsibility, but there may be other areas in which the federal government can develop consumer protection programs and there may be a real need to co-ordinate what is being done now in a number of departments.

It is the government's intention to ask the Economic Council to look at the field of