

Government Organization Act, 1970

I believe that the parliamentary system is one of the best systems that has ever been evolved to enable free men and women to have a voice in governing themselves. But if its elected representatives are to have less and less power, if they are increasingly to become rubber stamps, if they are merely to be brought together to vote for or against non-confidence motions and to ram through estimates on the last prescribed day, then Parliament and its reputation will suffer and a great many of the rising generation will be looking to other methods of governing this country.

This provision is a retrograde step. It is something that the government does not need. If the government wants ministers to deal with specific problems, then it has the authority to appoint ministers without portfolio, if the government needs to set up additional departments, such as a department of housing and urban affairs, then Parliament will support the government. Indeed, I think all parties in the House have at different times urged the government to set up a department of housing and urban affairs. Certainly, the Mayors and Municipalities Association of Canada has been urging this for years.

The government does not have to take this action through the back door, and I should like to ask why it is using this method. Is it because the type of legislation that it has in mind is such that it thinks the House will object to it? Or is it going to be such a piece of window dressing that a ministry of state will be created with virtually no power to be more than a sort of study group to give the Canadian people the impression something is being done when, in fact, the government does not intend such a ministry to do anything at all? I hope that the President of the Treasury Board will tell this committee the reason the government is adopting this method. If the government does want to set up a department of housing and urban affairs, I ask the President of the Treasury Board why it does not bring in a bill to set up such a department.

The Chairman: Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but I do so to advise him that his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

The Chairman: The hon. member may continue with the consent of the committee. Is there such consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

The Chairman: I do not hear unanimous consent. The hon. member for Lotbinière.

Mr. Drury: That came from behind you, John.

Mr. Diefenbaker: No, it did not.

The Chairman: Order, please. The Chair has recognized the hon. member for Lotbinière.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Chairman, we are currently studying Part IV of the act respecting the organization of the

[*Mr. Douglas.*]

government of Canada and matters related or incidental thereto.

According to Clause 14, the government proposes to establish ministries of state which would handle various matters.

When perusing the legislation, one starts wondering what these matters are and why should a ministry of state be established. Clause 14 provides that ministries of state will be created. We therefore have to find in the bill in which specific areas the government intends acting in order to justify the creation of a department or a ministry and the appointment of a minister of state.

The answer to this basic question does not appear in the bill, nor is it mentioned in the government's statements, or those of the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), because, at any rate, even if he is the sponsor of the bill he does not dare pilot it himself.

It is therefore nearly impossible for the opposition to find out why the government wants to create these new ministries of state. We must be satisfied with what is written, trying to justify honestly the establishment of these ministries.

Therefore, I would like to make a detailed study of some clauses of this bill. The questions I ask myself and that I want to ask my hon. colleagues are as follows: What definite fields will be covered by the ministries of state? Who will create them? And finally, whose authority will these ministries of state come under? Who will they be under? The government or parliament?

Therefore, I would like to study immediately clause 14 which states:

● (4:00 p.m.)

Where it appears to the Governor in Council that the requirements for formulating and developing new and comprehensive policies in relation to any matter or matters coming within the responsibility of the Government of Canada warrant the establishment for the time being of a special portion of the public service of Canada presided over by a Minister...

This is the reason why the government wants to create a ministry of state. For some reason or other the governor in council will create a ministry of state in order to deal with a problem or to make some study.

Mr. Chairman, this reason means nothing, of course. It is simply a legal jumble which justifies nothing, explains nothing and does not say why a ministry of state will be created.

Mr. Chairman, I doubt then that we are justified in creating ministries of state. We are not opposed in principle and we expect it to be clearly understood. However, we would like to know what the duties of these ministries of state will be, why they will be set up and under what circumstances.

Let us assume for instance that a serious housing crisis exist all across Canada—such as the one now prevailing—and reflects unfavourably on the government in the public opinion. Let us assume that such a crisis is prejudicial to the government; let us assume that there is a very urgent need for a change in housing policy, that the