

Government Organization

whole, and more especially to the people of the province of Quebec.

• (5:10 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, the growth in absolute and relative terms of the involvement of the federal government in our economic and social affairs has been great indeed during the past decade. When the Prime Minister calls Bill C-178 a first step in making the executive of the government more efficient, I think members in all corners of the house will perhaps commend that statement and regard the aims of the bill as laudable.

Our leader stated on May 9 some of the principles that we think are required in the whole reorganization of the administration of our federal government. I will not go over many of the things that were stated at that time. I point out, however, as was stated on that occasion, that administrative improvement is no substitute for policy. When the requirements of a complex and growing society move ahead of policy a vacuum is created. That vacuum of necessity must temporarily be filled by ad hoc regulations. This has happened in almost every department of government during the last two or three years.

As an example may I point to the Department of Transport. We have no regional air policy and as a result many areas of Canada are suffering. The only reason I bring that up, and I hope I am not out of order, is that we must not delude ourselves into thinking that improvements in the administrative structure are a substitute for policy directives which have not been forthcoming recently.

I submit there are a number of glaring deficiencies, in Bill C-178 in tidying up some of the problems that have recently manifested themselves. The Prime Minister suggested that this bill was only one of the first steps in what was envisaged. I think there were serious deficiencies even in his statement because he did not inform the house whether the government had considered the matters I have raised.

For example, I hope that serious consideration has been given to improving the response by the whole government organization to parliamentary directives. The public accounts committee has brought in reports which have been concurred in by the house. Yet we sometimes find that several years

later there has been no response by government departments in keeping with such concurrence. Surely when a standing committee of the house makes a report containing several recommendations and that report is concurred in by this house, such recommendations become directives that the government is obliged to carry out.

I am not sure whether the Minister of National Revenue is shaking his head at that suggestion. If the government has become so arrogant that it finds it unnecessary to respond to the directives of the house, then I suggest that parliamentary democracy has degenerated to a great extent in this country. I hope that is not so. I am not on the public accounts committee this session. I do read some of its reports and I talk to some of its members. They are deeply disturbed that such recommendations have been ignored year after year. Without being unduly critical I therefore suggest that the government should have thought of ways and means of bringing about a better response and closer liaison between government departments and parliament so that such directives will not be ignored from session to session and from parliament to parliament.

In many areas I find myself to some degree in agreement with what was said by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis). I refer to the protection which it is suggested should be extended to consumers in order to protect them from the various abuses that have grown up. I may also say that in certain areas I disagree vigorously with the suggestions put forward by the hon. member for York South. For example, he complained vehemently and almost bitterly that the government had not set up a department of economic and social planning for Canada. If the government as a whole has any purpose at all it must be involved in the planning of our economic and social structure. If the hon. member is disappointed because there is not one department with super authority over all other departments to issue directives respecting planning, then, Mr. Speaker, I hope he remains disappointed for a long time to come.

We do not want, I think, any super authorities in the government structure with power to regulate certain departments and set certain courses. This is the function of cabinet or of such agencies or commissions and so on which have been set up by cabinet to study problems and to make recommendations. There are and have been sufficient commissions set up to study a large number