

*Corporate and Consumer Affairs*

—here the minister could have been more frank with us at the resolution stage but perhaps that was unintentional—the Department of the Registrar General. It is as simple as that. The new department retains the duties that are now performed by the Registrar General by virtue of its creation originally under the Government Organization Act. The duties which were given to the Registrar General at that time by that act have been carried over into clause 5 of the bill before us.

Only two functions have been added by the bill before us which are not included in the existing functions of the Registrar General. One is in the area of corporation securities, which is an entirely homogenous function to place under his jurisdiction. The other is consumer affairs referred to in clause 5(a) of the bill. The Economic Council, as was stated at the resolution stage, recommended that all that would be necessary at this stage of the development of government intervention in consumer affairs would be the creation of an interdepartmental committee with a permanent secretariat to serve under the general jurisdiction of the Registrar General. The government has seen fit to fly in the face of that recommendation. I believe the only reason the government has adopted this course of really putting the cart before the horse is to acquire a new name for the up and coming young minister, the present Registrar General. He is spoken of, and I dare say with a great deal of justification, as a serious contender for the leadership of his party. Perhaps this explains another thing.

Normally the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) is the one who introduces a bill to set up a new department. Here we have departed from that precedent and we have the young and personable Registrar General introducing a bill to set up a department which he is going to head. This leads me to one of two conclusions. Either the minister has such a degree of importance in his own party that he has been given this honour or the Prime Minister simply does not care enough about consumer affairs to introduce the bill in accordance with precedent. A moment ago the minister spoke of a horse and a hen. He referred to the practice of the prospective purchaser looking in a horse's mouth and testing it in other ways to see whether or not it was sound before buying it. There is no doubt in my mind as to which end of the horse the consumer thinks he is on. Perhaps these observations help to explain this so-called new department and the practice that

[Mr. Nielsen.]

is being followed by the minister in introducing the bill to establish it.

The objection we have to this bill is that it is weak. How is it going to bring down the cost of a pair of shoes to a breadwinner who has to buy shoes for seven pairs of feet? How is it going to bring down the cost of a pound of hamburger, which has gone sky high as a result of the high-spending policies and conduct of this government? How is it going to achieve these things? How is it going to bring down the cost of a pound of butter, a loaf of bread or a quart of milk? I suggest that clause 6 is the only operative clause in the bill. Many high-flown phrases are used but there is no provision with teeth in it. There is nothing in the bill that will protect consumers against increased prices. There is nothing at all in the bill which would provide for some kind of enforcement against abuses which the new department is going to attempt to cure.

• (4:00 p.m.)

The bill is another example of window dressing on the part of this government, the same kind of window dressing to which the house was subjected when the now Minister of Industry (Mr. Drury) told us during the debate on the setting up of his new department that it was going to spend \$25 million or thereabouts whereas this year it is spending over \$140 million. Yet hon. members opposite, Mr. Speaker, wonder why we show concern, the same concern shown by the Economic Council, at the proliferation of government departments.

Yesterday I was astounded to hear the minister say, as reported on page 3211 of *Hansard*:

I have already told the house that the steps we are taking here constitute a reorganization of the existing responsibilities of government. I also said that after deducting the revenues of this department from its expenditures the net cost to the taxpayer this fiscal year will be less than \$2 million.

That, as true as it may be, leaves a grossly unfair impression not only with members of the house but with the public at large. The revenues which the minister speaks about are taxes. They are revenues derived from the operation of the Patent Act, the Copyright Act, the Corporations Act and so on.

**Mr. Turner:** They are charges for services.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Charges for services, says the minister. I do not think the minister can call