

Office of Parliamentary Commissioner

and at the end of this brief period of debate may be referred to the appropriate committee for further study and consideration.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Chretien (St. Maurice-Lafleche): Mr. Speaker, may I, first of all, congratulate the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) for the excellent legislation he just submitted to the house.

The position of parliamentary commissioner, which in Swedish is called "ombudsman"—defender of the people—seems particularly appropriate at this time in the federal administration.

At present, there are 21 government departments, 40 crown corporations and several boards with which taxpayers often have to deal.

Undeniably, if a person sincerely feels that an administrative decision is unfair to him, he will be confused, will not know what to do and will lose the benefit of a right to which he is entitled. In view of the constant expansion of public powers in Canada over a number of years, laws are often arbitrarily administered at all levels of government. Sometimes, we, the elected representatives of the people, are unable to help our constituents claim their rights because we fail to break through the solidarity of various groups of officials.

The ordinary citizen, therefore, needs extra protection which he can no longer get from ordinary courts.

Furthermore, when the taxpayer does resort to judiciary procedures available to him, these are more likely to be too slow and surely too expensive. Some people feel that it is not necessary to provide the services of an ombudsman to citizens whose rights have been encroached upon by the government. They maintain that members of parliament are already providing this service to the electors, either when they take up complaints personally with the responsible minister or when they ask questions in the house in this connection.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, when the case of this young sailor, Gordon Knott, came up during the last session, I was particularly impressed by the unfair treatment which he had received as a result of administrative decisions which are sometimes too arbitrary.

We find out, time and again when discussing with some of our constituents who often have to deal with officials of important federal departments, that they run into arrogance and indifference, because those officials are often appointed for life and they do not care about the rights of the individual as long as they, the permanent civil servants, are right.

[Mr. Thompson.]

I must say that on several occasions, I was really put out when I met with rebuffs on behalf of my constituents.

I am convinced that a completely independent office should be set up so as to enable any citizen, in any constituency, to assert his claims and to obtain justice when he is wronged and even when he feels that an administrative decision encroaches upon his rights.

I should like once again to congratulate the sponsor of this bill, and I hope that it will be fully looked into in the near future so that we may enable our constituents to assert their claims before a proper organization in our country where government authority is ever expanding and where we have an ever increasing number of agencies. The present situation should also be corrected, because when a member of parliament submits the claims of his constituents, he often has to put up with the arrogance of officials who think we are only trying to protect our own interests.

I am convinced that the office of ombudsman is urgently needed, and I shall be very pleased to vote in favour of this motion when it is considered in committee.

[Text]

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take this opportunity of adding my support for the bill that has been presented by the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson). I fully agree with the principle involved, and I think probably the majority of the members of this house do. The hon. member for Red Deer has advanced a number of cogent reasons for the necessity of instituting this office. There are one or two other additional ideas which I should like to present at this time.

I think everyone is familiar with the enormous growth of government, in all its administrative branches, which has spread into virtually every form of our existence during the last 25 years. The need for this office now has been pointed out particularly in another context—

[Translation]

Mr. Frenette: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member who now has the floor but the French interpretation system does not seem to be operating properly. As I am interested in the debate, I would like to be able to follow the arguments of the hon. member on the matter under consideration at present.

[Text]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will have the trouble seen to immediately. Perhaps the hon.