

*Government Orders*

● (1340)

It may be a small thing but it is a dangerous concept. No longer do we have separate jurisdictions. We collapse them all into one. It is a dangerous dilution of accountability and an unwise splitting of ministerial authority.

A deputy minister of Environment Canada could delegate some of his power to an official from National Defence. To which minister would the civil servants then be accountable? In the case of conflict whose orders do they follow? Both ministers would have a valid claim on their services and their actions and indeed both ministers could be held accountable for what they did.

In the end what would happen is a public servant would do something wrong and one minister could say it was really not his department, it was the other minister's department and vice versa, back and forth. Any accountability will be lost. This is a move in the wrong direction.

In the end no one would be accountable for the actions of that type of public servant. I sincerely hope that this clause will never see the light of day. I hope our members will be able to address it more fully in committee.

I want to dwell on clause 8 which gives tremendous power to the Public Service Commission, a power which should not be given to it. I want to talk about the competitive process of job applications for a moment.

Western democracies have always depended on checks and balances. This is born out of a basic mistrust of government, I think a valid mistrust of government. It is an attitude which says: "We think you are doing okay right now, but we don't know what you would do if the checks and balances were not in place". That is why we have opposition parties in the House of Commons. That is why we have opposition parties in committees and so on. It is in order to scrutinize the actions of the government.

Checks and balances are very important. They are vital for the health of a western democracy. When we see that an opposition party, for example, in some third world country is getting mistreated by the government we see that democracy, and that country in general, is in trouble. There are checks and balances right through our system.

One check against nepotism, bribery and other forms of corruption in government is the competitive process. This means that people get jobs through merit and not because they are someone's friend. That process is open to scrutiny. It is fair. It means that we get the best person for the job.

The selection process within the federal government is really quite fair. All the checks and balances are in place to make sure nepotism does not take place.

That is why I feel such concern when I read clause 8 of Bill C-76. We are in a period of flux right now, a flurry of activity, where the departments are downsizing and there is a certain amount of chaos in a big reorganization of government. During this time there is a chance that the vigilance and the controls are not going to be as strong as they have been in the past and as they usually are.

Clause 8 empowers the Public Service Commission during this chaotic and stormy time to appoint an employee without competition to another position within the jurisdiction of the deputy head for which in the opinion of the commission the employee is qualified. This is a dangerous departure from the merit principle.

Reformers believe that a system of checks and balances is the only way to ensure that corruption is weeded out of the system, and the competitive process is the check on the public service that is missing under this clause of the bill.

All sorts of irrelevant qualifications could be used here, anything from "I'm a good friend of the decision maker", to "I'm a relative of somebody else you know", to the pressure that sometimes can be imposed from the outside. That departure from the merit principle is a serious departure that public servants should be very alarmed about. At any rate, people can be appointed without consideration of merit using this clause.

● (1345)

I agree with the idea the commissioner should be able to appoint surplus people to different departments. However, again the merit principle in the competition should continue in that process.

If merit does not need to be a factor in this clause and if the competitive process can fall by the wayside without a backward glance in this clause, the government can use it for other purposes as well. Even under the current regulations of the Public Service Employment Act there is already in place a system under the employment equity plan by which a member of an employment equity group can be appointed to a position in accordance with an employment equity program excluding merit, discrimination and geographic area with no right of appeal. That is a serious departure from the merit principle and something the government should not be delving into. I rest my case.

**Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I did enjoy the hon. member Fraser Valley East's speech on the budget. However, I would like to ask him if he has given consideration to the fact the deficit and debt did not