Paper Pollution

The government's procedure in cases of emergency

The following is a tale of government efficiency over the crucial issues of the day. We all know that pollution has become a sufficiently fashionable issue that politicians now make political capital of it.

But when it comes time for legislation a funny thing happens. Words are fast, but the practical business of handling important bills on important subjects is low – like oozing sludge. Bills are considered, not on merit, but on who puts them forward. That is to say, only the bills brought forward by the Government, that is, the Cabinet, are actually given anything near proper consideration. All other bills disappear.

When a private member puts forward a bill it automatically recieves a first reading; then it goes on the order paper. From this point there is an hour allotted to the bill in Parliament for it to get through the second reading and go on to the committee stage.

If the discussion of the private member's bill is not completed within the allotted hour, the bill goes back to the bottom of the order paper and has to wait weeks until it works its way to the top again.

At that point it receives another hour and if the discussion is not completed within the hour down it goes again, back to the bottom of the list.

As a rule the government party finds it convenient not to allow the private member's bill to ever reach the committee stage. To this end the government whip distributes prepared information to the government backbenchers so that these can discuss the bill for longer than the allotted hour.

This information is prepared for the government party by the supposedly nonpartisan civil service through a process which is a graphic illustration of a third type of pollution endangering Canadians – namely, paper pollution.

Somewhere, within the bowels of the legislation branch of each department, there is a cipher who has to read the Hansard, the Regular Proceedings, the Votes and Proceedings, and the Debates of the Senate each and every day!

When this lowly drudge finds something relating to his department, he sends a memo to his chief, who notifies the head of the branch concerned, who notifies the assistant deputy minister in charge of that programme area, who notifies the deputy minister's executive assistant, who notifies the deputy minister, who notifies the executive assistant of the minister who notifies the minister himself. Himself (the minister) thereupon gives his assistant (executive) the go-ahead signal.

This command then goes all the way back down the line, step-by-webbed-footed-step until it lands back before the drudge who dredged up the original information.

Said drudge then prepares a packet of information which upon completion is passed along the same relay system, in the course of which process it is initialled by every rubber stamp en route until it reaches the deputy minister who takes it home, rewrites the packet and then sends it through to the minister in question – carbon copies going to everyone involved.

This information is subsequently used to block the private member's bill -- and all bills of the same sort, which in many cases is likely to be of vital concern to the nation.

The entire laborious process adds significantly to the intellectual and political stagnation of Parliament.

There are currently seven or eight private members' bills dealing with pollution which are wasting away on the order paper.

These bills were prepared by opposition members – the government backbenchers having been warned to stay away from Joe Green's preserve.

There is some small hope that the government will eventually implement a few of the ideas put forward in these bills, but meantime there will be a lapse of at least two years to allow for paper pollution, and make-work in the civil service.

Of particular interest is a piece of proposed legislation called Bill C-131, designated as "An Act respecting the Marketing of Synthetic Detergents."

It says: **"No person shall manufacture, advertise, sell or distribute any cleaning agent with a content of one or more detergents unless those detergents are 80% biologically decomposable.**

"Everyone who fails to comply with the requirements of (the above) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to a fine of five thousand dollars for a first offence and of ten thousand dollars for each subsequent offence.

"It shall be the duty of the Minister of National Health and Welfare to keep under review the difficulties arising in sewage works, rivers and water supply as a result of the use of synthetic detergents and to make regulations for the proper administration of this Act."

Mild as this piece of legislation is, it goes some way toward filling a yawning abyss. We should therefore, follow the progress of this bill with somewhat more than passing interest.

Baha'i Writings

"If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine."

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Nominations for the position of SRC comptroller are held open until 12 o'clock noon on Sunday, February 1st.

Nominations must contain a nominator and ten seconders, including the name, Fredericton address, phone number, faculty and year of each.

Nominations are to be turned into the returning officer, Don Olmstead, at the SRC office. The SRC office will be open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Thursday and Friday and from 10 a.m.-12 noon on Saturday and Sunday, January 31st, and February 1st.

During hours that the SRC office is closed nominations may be put under the locked door of the SRC Business Office, 2nd floor SUB.

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