

Financial Administration Act

aggrieved." It is interesting to note that under this bill 1.75A(2) the only cases to be submitted to the Auditor General, in this capacity, would be those referred to him by Members of Parliament.

A great deal has been said about our 264 Members of Parliament actually serving as 264 ombudsmen. We cannot challenge that statement, because a good part of our time as M.P.'s is spent doing this type of work, and it is our responsibility to undertake it. I think it strengthens democracy in the eyes of the public if we carry out such functions. However, what concerns me, Mr. Speaker, is that very often problems come to our attention which, under the terms of reference and the authority we can muster, we cannot deal with, even though we wish to make sure that the citizen concerned receives justice in his complaint. We do not have the power of inquiry; we do not have the facilities for research and investigation that an ombudsman would have or that the Auditor General has. It is important therefore, in my opinion, that there be this extension of the work which we admit is our responsibility. I believe it can only be satisfactorily carried out by the establishment of a formal office such as we are speaking about.

There are other points in the bill I wish to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker. There are one or two matters that are perhaps of prime importance. One of those is this: the auditor, acting as commissioner or as parliamentary commissioner, if you will, "before investigating a grievance shall inform the power or authority or officer of such power or authority administering the law of Canada whereby any person is aggrieved or, in his opinion, may be aggrieved, of his intention to investigate". Thus, this officer acting as ombudsman would be working with the various departments that relate to administration matters. His function would be limited but it would strengthen, in my opinion, not only the work of the department concerned but also the confidence which the public has and must have in its administration. That is vitally necessary if democracy is to be effective. Evidence submitted by the Public Accounts Committee and contained within the reports of the Auditor General shows that there have been many mistakes and non-productive payments. The best known example of these is probably the matter of the *Bonaventure*, so far as a waste of money is concerned.

Mr. Bell: Hear, hear.

[Mr. Thompson.]

Mr. Thompson: If mistakes have been made in the administration as that relates to the spending of the taxpayer's dollar, surely they have been made in defence, public works or other departments of government. How much more likely is it, therefore, that there are many cases of grievance that affect the very lives and rights of Canadian citizens.

The Auditor General has proved his worth over and over again; he has even embarrassed the government in recent years. He has proved the effectiveness of his office. On the basis of existing evidence it seems to me that the office of ombudsman is necessary for the individual Canadian citizen. This bill constitutes the simplest way of bringing this about. The establishment of this office would be the simplest way of correcting administrative errors and mistaken judgments. The ombudsman is equally important for the individual citizen.

I am going to mention two cases which have come to my attention in the last few months. Both cases involve senior citizens who thought they had no redress and whose difficulties seemed insoluble. One case concerned a man who, through a mistake in submitting his income tax in 1969, was assessed \$157.17 more tax than he had paid. This man is a senior citizen and not in very good health. When he received the communication from the tax department telling him that failure to reply or respond to its notice within 15 days would result in legal action without further notice, he panicked. He envisioned himself being taken to jail and immediately went out to seek some friend or bank or person from whom he could borrow this money that he was being asked to pay. He did not question in his mind whether he could successfully fight the department. He knew of no way he could appeal. I happened to investigate the case. I learned that he did not have the money to even repay the loan. In going over his income tax return I realized there must have been an error. Mistakes have occurred before now. Perhaps I will be able to correct this mistake. The matter is being investigated at the present time. The point is that if there had been an ombudsman, perhaps the tax officials would have looked over the man's case more carefully. Perhaps the official writing the letter would have been a little more careful or more concerned about the matter.

Another example concerns a man who is 68 years of age. He has been unable to establish his proof of birth. It so happens that he had a stroke about five years ago and his memory