

*Financial Administration Act*

tor General straight away, we can engage in some fairly accurate speculation as to the reasons. Certainly we all have our sources and we have heard of the rumours and mutterings that were part of this debate.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the office of the Comptroller General will result in another central agency function which will restrict the flexibility of the managers of existing departments and agencies of the government. Nobody wants another authority looking over their shoulder to ensure that they are performing their financial functions properly. It is an additional annoyance to deputies, assistant deputies and so on. Consequently, they resisted it, and resisted it quite vigorously. Such resistance may well have been merited had these senior officials been demonstrably efficient and effective in fulfilling their responsibilities, which clearly the Auditor General indicates they have not been.

It is common at this point for ministers and their deputies to invoke the principle of ministerial responsibility in defending their position. Their arguments go something like this. They say: "Look, we have a job to do, we have certain responsibilities to perform and a department to manage." Let us manage that department and, under the principle of ministerial responsibility, the minister is thereby accountable for any mismanagement in his department. We need no further checks. Let us manage. We have ministerial responsibility. Ministers will be responsible and then democracy will take care of things. We have a great deal of recent experience, to indicate that when in fact it becomes time to face up to the responsibilities the principle of ministerial responsibility seems to collapse. We have especially during this administration had numerous instances where examples of gross incompetence have been evidenced all the way from the *Bonaventure* to the recent AECL escapade. We have had examples of clear-cut illegal activity.

The Auditor General's report is full of examples of sheer mismanagement. Yet at no time in the last 10 years has any minister resigned or been asked to resign as a result of incompetent or illegal activity occurring under his area of ministerial responsibility. Nor indeed, Mr. Speaker, have there been any examples of any senior civil servants having to pay the price for gross mismanagement under their areas of responsibility. Therefore when any minister or deputy minister or Prime Minister or anybody else tries to claim to this House and to the public that the doctrine of ministerial responsibility provides the necessary safeguards, checks and balances, they are guilty of peddling the flimsiest and shabbiest flimflam.

The net effect of that whole operation is that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his principal secretary, Michael Pitfield, make the decisions; the ministers are merely mouthpieces. That is the net result of this horrible complex collegial system which the government has put in place. Under those circumstances how can we talk about ministerial responsibility?

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) is being told by his officials today to bring forward a budget. He would like to bring forward a budget, but it is not his decision. Some

[Mr. Andre.]

committee in cabinet is sitting before the Privy Council office. The Minister of Finance is the mouthpiece, he is here to explain. If he does not explain a situation properly he will be transferred to another job and another mouthpiece will be appointed. But to suggest the Minister of Finance is making decisions and to hold him responsible is ridiculous.

There is no opportunity for the public to supervise ministerial responsibility. Can we supervise ministerial responsibility as members of parliament? We had a discussion this afternoon about the difficulty of members of parliament in even getting their questions before the House. There is no way that a committee of the House can summon a minister before it. There is no way we can force a minister to answer. There was a time when the House could hold up the estimates of a minister's department until he gave members the answers and they got the answers they wanted.

When it comes time to cover up and hide and to resist freedom of information action, we have ministerial responsibility trumpeted forward. When it is time to face up to responsibilities after something has happened and when a "boo-boo" has been brought to the public's eyes, well, ministerial responsibility is quickly abandoned. How are we expected to supervise ministerial responsibility? How is that responsibility ever measured, assessed, or how does anyone hold a minister responsible? Can it be done at elections?

There have been 115 ministerial changes in the last 10 years. If someone is dissatisfied at the way the Post Office is being run, what minister will they hold responsible? There have been four or five ministers over the last few years. If someone is angry at the solicitor general's operation, who will they hold responsible? How can there be ministerial responsibility when no minister stays put and they are moved around? It is musical chairs. Then there is the cabinet system, the so-called collegial system which this government runs. Ministers do not make decisions in this government. Decisions are made in committee in this collegial apparatus. There is committee upon committee upon committee. That procedure has been taken away from us. There is no such authority. There is absolutely no way in which the House of Commons can hold a minister responsible or can force him to live up to his responsibilities.

To talk about ministerial responsibility is strictly a sham. It should be dismissed from the lexicon of arguments. We do not have ministerial responsibility under this particular government.

It is necessary therefore for parliament to build into this legislation the type of activity and performance we expect from a Comptroller General so that he can in his day to day administration, ensure that proper respect is paid for the taxpayers' money, otherwise the government will do whatever it wants and we will have had no change from the current situation which the Auditor General points out is in disarray.

Nobody in this party likes the notion of imposing new central control or more bureaucracy, more red tape on an already overburdened government. However, Mr. Speaker, there is one thing we like less and that is the waste and