

The Minister of National Defence touched upon some of the ways in which we might bring an immediacy to government and to the people. In particular he referred to the possibility of constituency offices and their use. If I have time at the end of my remarks I shall comment on that suggestion. At this time, however, there are three points I should like to make to the hon. member for Red Deer. I accept the proposition of the shrinking individual relative to the growing government. But I seriously question whether the ombudsman system—and that, after all, is what we are talking about—would work at the federal level. I seriously question whether the Auditor General is the appropriate person, even in the event it should be found possible that an ombudsman system might work at the federal level. I think the issue here is that of the independence of the Auditor General vis-à-vis Parliament and Members of Parliament.

I question the timing of this bill. During May and June of this year the Public Accounts Committee spent many hours dealing with the role and status of the Auditor General. In the report that was tabled before Parliament on June 26, one of the recommendations was that the duties of the Auditor General of Canada as spelled out in the present legislation are satisfactory. In its report No. 34, the Public Accounts Committee dealt in some detail with the recommendations of the Auditor General's department. This was done after many meetings, many of which were attended by the Auditor General himself who participated as a witness. At the present time the government of Canada is considering the recommendations of this committee. For that reason I think it would be inappropriate for the House at this time to refer this bill for further study in committee.

Let me say a word or two about the federal-provincial aspect of an ombudsman's function. The Minister of National Defence has already indicated the difficulties and dangers of embracing an institution suited to other jurisdictions and adopting it with little or no change to our jurisdiction. He pointed out in his remarks, as did the hon. member for Red Deer, that four provinces, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick have adopted the ombudsman system. Surely it is far easier to adopt in a limited jurisdiction where the geography lends itself to the type of contact that is essential between the individual and the ombudsman. The hon. member for Red Deer in his remarks referred to universities and the fact that some of our universities had

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adopted the ombudsman system. Here again I suggest the geographical and homogeneous nature of a constituency lends itself to this arrangement.

One or two items in the hon. member's bill worry me from the point of view of the independence of the Auditor General. This is my second point. For instance, it would appear that any aggrieved party could initiate action provided he or she obtained the concurrence of a Member of Parliament who would then process the grievance. It is made clear that the commissioner, the ombudsman, shall act only at the instance of a member of the House of Commons, as the elective, representative body in Parliament, and on complaint of personal injustice suffered by a complainant. This, surely, raises real questions about the independence of the Auditor General, because the bill provides that the Auditor General could refuse to process or investigate a grievance. Surely no stretch of the imagination is required to visualize the situation he would be in if he should refuse to do so, having first accepted the task at the instance of a Member of Parliament.

The Auditor General could be subject to all sorts of party or individual political pressure, which I think would spoil the essential independence of his office. Nor does the bill make clear whether it would be at the instance of an individual or of Parliament, that is, at the instance of an individual acting separately or Parliament acting collectively.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It being six o'clock, the hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business has expired and I do now leave the chair, to resume the same at eight o'clock p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ABDUCTION OF SENIOR BRITISH TRADE
COMMISSIONER—STATEMENT BY
MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I understand that the Secretary of State for External