

Financial Administration Act

Mr. McGrath: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I must say I am flattered at the interest in my speech by the members opposite.

Mr. Francis: The members on this side are always interested in following the events of the House. I listened to the hon. member's complaints about the committee system, and he seems to have a most unfortunate record in those committees in which he participated. He singled out the Public Accounts Committee, and I want to pay my tribute to the way in which the chairman of that committee, who is present here, has conducted that committee.

I would like to ask the hon. member for St. John's East: Is not a very significant factor in the way a committee functions the degree of partisanship shown by the members who participate in it?

Mr. McGrath: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is unfortunately the case. Of course, you cannot have committees functioning in an objective, non-partisan way when they are presided over by partisan chairmen. We had evidence of that when the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) behaved in a most partisan way last week when we were examining the estimates of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, including a vote for CMHC, and he refused to allow members of the opposition the right to direct questions to the president of CMHC. It is that kind of partisan conduct that has killed any degree of objectivity.

The other point that has hurt committees badly is the rule whereby the whips can change the membership on committees without so much as a by-your-leave. There was a time when, in order to change membership in committees, you had to come to this House with a resolution. Today, if the whip finds any member of the committee getting out of hand—and it happens on both sides of the House—all he has to do is notify the Clerk that so-and-so is no longer a member of the committee. In fact, there are even times when the member involved is not given the courtesy of being notified. All these things combined are helping to destroy the committee system in this House.

Mr. Francis: The members have a responsibility as well as the chairman.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lachance: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont (Mr. Lachance) on a point of order.

Mr. Lachance: Would the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) allow a question?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I think we should get back to the business at hand. This is not a question period nor are we in committee of the whole.

Mr. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. The hon. member referred to the whips replacing members. I would like to remind him that during my term as whip this has not

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier).]

occurred, although a member of the opposite side once referred to me as the whip when I was deputy whip.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I would just remind the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain that that is not a point of order and therefore he is not recognized on a point of order.

● (1512)

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) on a point of order.

Mr. Pinard: I would simply like to understand the situation. Was there not unanimous consent of the House to allow the hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont (Mr. Lachance) to ask his question of the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), who showed willingness to reply, since he will probably never have the opportunity to reply to questions in the House in future years. Could the hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont ask him a very relevant question about his speech if there is unanimous consent, as seems to be the case, Mr. Speaker?

[*English*]

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to because the hon. member is going to need all the practice he can get.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary has a point. If there is time and the time of the hon. member for St. John's East has not expired, the question can be put, if there is consent. Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lachance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank hon. members, and especially the hon. member for New Westminster, for their patience.

[*Translation*]

Since I will probably not see him on this side of the House in the future, I would like to ask the hon. member whether, in view of his comments about the reform of this House, which we both agree is extremely important, he can promise on behalf of his party to accept the recommendations contained in the three reports of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization and whether he will co-operate with the government when it introduces amendments to the Standing Orders of the House?