

Financial Administration Act

because, indeed, the House has a right to examine these Crown corporations independently when they come before committees with their estimates.

Getting back to the rules, I have already said that there is not a member of this House from the Prime Minister down who would not admit in his own heart that this system is not working, that we have to change it. That is why we, by order of reference in the last session, referred the whole matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. We put in a lot of time and effort in that committee in the last session. Indeed, I can recall sitting when the House was in recess. We established sub-committees, and we went about our work seriously. We examined other legislatures around the world, and we really took our task seriously because we knew that the House took this matter seriously.

What happened to the report of that committee? It never saw the light of day. It just did not happen to suit the particular strategy of the government House leader at that particular time. He felt that the government was going to have to give too much and the opposition give too little. That was the way he proceeded, if I am not doing him an injustice. The result is that the whole matter was allowed to die and all of the work we did, the recommendations that we had put together after exhaustive study, travel and surveys, came to naught.

One of the things we looked at and reached consensus on was the establishment of a public expenditures committee that would have an ongoing function like the Public Accounts Committee. It would have an ongoing function in relation to the expenditures of all government departments and would be able to call any government department at any time throughout the year, as opposed to the present system whereby estimates are referred to committee for approximately three months. I forget when the estimates are brought in, somewhere around March, but they are reported back to the House at the end of May.

Indeed, sir, there is not a year that goes by that there is not at least one department, if not two and sometimes even more, on an agency of government that does not even get before committee. Their estimates are never examined by a committee or anybody else. The House then goes through the humiliation of having to pass an appropriations bill, knowing that we are going to be voting for \$46 billion of expenditures without having properly examined these various departments as to how these moneys are being spent, or holding them accountable for how they spent their money last year. It is the day for humiliation in this House when we have to sit down at night and pass that appropriations bill year after year, knowing full well that we have not done our job, knowing full well that there have been estimates of government departments and agencies that have not even had cursory examination by committee. What an absolute farce! Is it any wonder that parliament is becoming irrelevant? Television in this House, in my view, instead of making parliament more relevant, will show it up for the irrelevancy that it has become.

Let the television cameras pan around this House tonight and see how many of us are here. And I am one of the guilty

[Mr. McGrath.]

ones, for I am not here all that often at night. This is an important bill. Let the television cameras go into the standing committees of this House where we are charged with examining \$50 billion of taxpayers' money and see how many members are in these committees—not a corporal's guard. We cannot even get the usual representatives from each party in order to proceed with the examination of witnesses.

There is an improper practice that has crept into our procedures which never should have been allowed in the first place, and that is where committees now function without quorums. Committees will now function if there are five members present as long as each of the two major parties are represented. I only wish that the television cameras could relay this live and in colour to the people of Canada so they would see how totally irrelevant this institution is. When it comes to accountability, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his government, which has brought this parliament to this sorry situation, will have to—when it gets up its nerve to go to the people of Canada—be accountable to Canadians for what it has done to this institution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: There is no possible way that they can justify what has happened to this place. The main issue in the election is going to be the economy, and rightly so. It is going to be the inflationary situation, the consequence of runaway government expenditures. It is going to be the growth in government, a government that has been on a spending spree for the past ten years, a government that has total disregard for this place or anybody else because they know they are no longer accountable. The daily oral question period is the only area of the accountability that we have left, and even that has been emaciated and truncated to the point where it is becoming less and less effective. It is a serious situation in which we find ourselves today.

● (2142)

In placing before the House the amendment of my colleague, the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre), we have tried to improve the situation and this bill. We do so firm in the belief that unless we put our own house in order, and unless we change these grossly inadequate rules, then we will have the Comptroller General coming back with the same sense of utter frustration that the Auditor General has come back here with year after year, saying that he cannot control the situation, that it is out of control. That is something we cannot allow to happen.

If we do allow that to happen again, then we will see the printing presses at the Bank of Canada churning out more money to pay for a spending spree by a government that is out of control. There is only one way we can control it and there is only one way we can change it. That change is just as inevitable as day follows night. The solution is to change this tired government, which has nothing but contempt for the institution of parliament.