

Financial Administration Act

have to go to the government House leader, who is a politician, who is a member of parliament and who is a member of the cabinet—who in other words is a member of the government. If he does not want to give us that reference, he does not have to. Is that democracy? I see a Liberal over there nodding his head in the affirmative. We have to go to one man in one party in one government to get a reference to subpoena witnesses before a committee.

I maintain that the committee system is an absolute sham. Why do we not democratize committees in this House? Why do we not make ourselves democratic in our committees? Why do we have to act according to party lines in committee? In some of my statements in committees I have disagreed with my party, and I know there are some Liberals and some Conservatives who have done the same. Why can we not stand up in committee and express what we really want to express without fear that we will be stepped on and kicked around by the House leader, regardless of what party is in office?

This relates directly to the changing times, and while one or two members may be laughing at present, there is one thing of which they may not be aware, and that is that the government is moving toward a congressional or republican system. If the government is moving in that direction, it only stands to reason that our committees should go the same way. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot have a sham of the parliamentary system—in fact, it is going republican; it is becoming an administration, not a parliament—and on the other hand try to hold on to the old, strict party line approach in committees. We must have more power.

I will conclude by saying that unless Mr. Rogers, the newly appointed Comptroller General, is permitted to report directly to a committee of the House before his information is hidden somewhere over there on the Treasury benches, this legislation is just a piece of nonsense. All we are doing is adding another bureaucrat at a high salary. Because what will happen is what happens with public accounts. In committee we come up and debate problems, inaccuracies, gross negligence, irresponsibility and non-accountability on the part of the government a year later, instead of having a handle on it when the problem is facing us and the country.

Unless the government is prepared to make the Comptroller General responsible to the House—

Mr. Andras: No way.

Mr. Blackburn:—I see no reason why this legislation should even proceed. However, I am prepared to support it, hoping—probably hoping against hope—that when it comes to committee changes will be made, that the government will introduce regulations which will make the Comptroller General responsible to parliament, not just to a few cabinet ministers. We have had enough of executive governing in this country. If we do not stop it now, we will end up without a democracy in this House. It will become only a little debating society. In fact, that is what it has been for almost all the time I have been here. So I hope that substantive changes will be made in the legislation before it becomes a statute.

[Mr. Blackburn.]

Mr. Alan Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be entering this debate tonight on this very important 15 line bill which seems to be drawing so much fire from the opposition side, based on the comments of the two official spokesmen for each of the parties. This is a bill that establishes what is probably one of the most significant positions in our federal government public service of recent years.

There are a number of points that I would like to mention during the course of my remarks tonight, but first I would like to refer back to a few points that have been raised by the two official spokesmen from the opposition parties who—and I know them to be people of high repute—amazingly enough are taking this 15 line bill, a very simple bill doing a very important thing, and attacking it in such a hard way.

We have been in business in this country for almost 111 years. For the first time we are now officially establishing a position of Comptroller General which may be equated in most people's minds to a position of chief financial officer in the private sector.

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The hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) commenced his remarks by being very vindictive toward this bill and this appointment. In my view, that does nothing to help the man who will be the first incumbent of this position. We all agree that he will have a very difficult task. It will be exceedingly difficult for this man to walk into a 300,000 plus organization in terms of people having an expenditure budget of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$45 billion. The new Comptroller General will be asked to ensure that there are adequate financial controls and systems in place throughout the entire system. That will be a very delicate and tricky task, and the new Comptroller General will need all the support that we as parliamentarians can muster for him.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre suggested that we are simply "purporting" to establish the position. He went on to say that, in his view, the bill would do nothing more than simply create another deputy minister. The hon. member played down the appointment to the extent that if he and his party had their way the Comptroller General would not be able to function in the manner intended by the government and by those of us who have been involved with the public accounts committee. The members of this committee fully supported this concept of a chief financial officer and urged the government to make the appointment. The hon. member for Calgary Centre spoke in a manner that would make it extremely difficult for the Comptroller General to accomplish the job that has been established for him.

The hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn), who is the official spokesman of the New Democratic Party on this Bill, has taken a very active part in our public accounts committee both during my time as vice-chairman and my other three years of active involvement with that committee. I know the hon. member's concerns. We have shared some of these con-