

Financial Administration Act

To all intents and purposes this has been achieved. We believe the qualifications of Mr. Rogers will measure up to our expectations. His final recommendation reads as follows:

... third, the appointment in each department, agency and Crown corporation of a senior financial officer, preferably designated as the Comptroller (in combination, if appropriate, with another designation such as Assistant Deputy Minister in departments or Vice-President in Crown corporations), who would be directly responsible to the deputy head or chief executive officer for all aspects of financial administration within his organization and who would possess the professional and personal qualifications and senior financial executive experience that are commensurate with his important responsibilities.

He went on to say:

... that implementation of these recommendations would lay the essential foundation of a soundly-conceived program for restoring effective control over public funds and assets, and for ensuring probity, prudence and economy in their management. I was confident that the government, parliament and, indeed, all taxpaying Canadians would subscribe to these objectives.

We subscribe to these objectives. If the Comptroller General is to achieve that, certainly he requires the support of all hon. members of parliament, all members of the senior executive within departments, and also the willingness of executives in Crown corporations to work with him. Crown corporations must co-operate with the new Comptroller General.

The Export Development Corporation bill receive second reading today. That corporation is one of many Crown corporations which have concerned taxpayers. The National Capital Commission is another Crown corporation found lacking in financial management and control. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will require a tremendous amount of effort in order for it to be brought under control. I hope all departmental officials, including deputy ministers and ministers, will make sure that no obstacles are placed in the pathway of this new official of the Government and Parliament of Canada.

The office of comptroller general is of fundamental importance to the survival of all Canadians. If he does not receive cooperation, the result will be a mess from which there is no return. I trust everyone will support him in the best possible manner.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) was in the House. Not too long ago he made some comments regarding the difficulties with which we in parliament are faced in respect of government expenditures. I am happy he joined with us to review the expenditures of government. Both of us have made suggestions to improve and rectify this matter. I am sure he and other hon. members are concerned by what appeared not too long ago in the most infamous of all Auditor General reports. It was the second to last one which gave rise to the whole movement and pressure in this House of Commons to appoint a comptroller general. The bill which arose from that report contained so much bad news and offered such a straightforward solution that it sent many people scurrying for cover.

[Mr. Towers.]

● (1652)

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that when the government finally decided that the time had come for it to accede to the demands for a comptroller general, we received a bill. The unfortunate part about the bill is that it merely calls for the appointment of the comptroller general. I have no quarrel with that.

I thank the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) for handing me the bill. It states:

The Governor in Council may appoint an officer called the Comptroller General of Canada to hold office during pleasure and to perform such duties and functions as may be assigned to him by the Treasury Board, and the Comptroller General of Canada shall rank as and have all the powers of a deputy head of a department.

That principle is acceptable to all sides of the House, but what I am concerned about, as, I am sure are all members of the House, including the hon. member for Scarborough East, who has taken such a great interest in this, is that at the outset, whereas every major officer in the hierarchy of government has his duties and scope of authority spelled out for him in legislation, the comptroller general alone is left without that kind of control or that kind of support that the terms of reference set out in a statute could mean for him. That is why the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) has put forth the motion that is before the House today, to give to the comptroller general specific statutory authority so he knows where he stands. Otherwise he will be bumped and buffeted by the government from place to place or priority to priority as things change, and must change from time to time.

I know that the Auditor General would want more for his creature, the Comptroller General of Canada—because in that sense he is. I am sure that he would not inform the House that he was dissatisfied completely with this. I am sure that that is the case, as the hon. member for Gatineau has mentioned, but I am sure he would agree that it would be best if we start off on the right foot. Let us start off on the basis on which no one who thinks about our financial proceedings in this House could argue that the comptroller general is best left to the whims of the government, but instead should be like all other officials who have terms of reference spelled out for them. I mean that not in the sense of the treasury bench, but in the sense that his colleagues all have other deputy heads and senior officials in their department. That is the purpose of it.

As the opposition in the House of Commons or during an election, we constantly reiterate the need to reduce government expenditures. This is not because we hate to see money wasted but because we are concerned about the immediate dangers of inflation and the long-term implications of public spending dominating the economy and overshadowing the economic forces which ultimately supply the country's wealth. The reply that we always receive is, "Well, would you like us to eliminate family allowances or pensions, starve babies, or throw widows out into the snow drifts?" We never get an admission—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Would you fire deputy ministers?