

Financial Administration Act

I listened again this afternoon to a version of the Golden Age from the hon. member for Calgary Centre. There was a time, he told us, when parliament could do things, when it could hold up a minister's estimates. Mr. Speaker, I was first elected to this parliament in 1963. There was no Golden Age. I remember a time when estimates were all taken in Committee of the Whole House. The opposition would zero in on one particular estimate. The government would rally in its defence. There would be division after division, and we would not change one dollar. The progress made, though, was very small and slow. I see my good friend from Nova Scotia sitting opposite and I know he will agree with what I am saying.

No really satisfactory mechanism has been devised either by this parliament or by any other parliament to vote supply in the way it was done a generation ago when supply was a relatively small item of business which could be easily envisaged and examined by an elected parliament of the nation.

The bill before us makes specific provision for what will be essentially a staff function provided within Treasury Board to the various departments of government. The Auditor General has enthusiastically endorsed it, and hon. members on the other side will, I am sure, all vote for it because they know in their hearts that it has to be done. There will, of course, always be ways of improving the manner in which we deal with estimates. The sums of money now involved present a very great challenge to the parliament of any nation. I am pleased to be here today to lend my support to this bill.

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, as a former chairman of the Public Accounts Committee I welcome the opportunity to speak on this bill. On the face of it, the measure looks rather simple and inoffensive, but I say that the necessity for introducing it shows there is something seriously wrong, otherwise the country would not require the services of a comptroller general.

I should like to take the House back to my native province for a minute or so. In Nova Scotia, in the old rum-running days, the ships used to carry a man called the supercargo. He was in addition to the captain. It was the supercargo's job to see that the rum was delivered to the right place and the right man in the right quantities. While today we are not dealing with rum, I submit to you, sir, that the principle is somewhat the same. We need a comptroller general to make certain the taxpayers of Canada receive value for their tax dollars, and that moneys allocated are used for the expressed purpose outlined by parliament instead of being spent on some pet project far in excess of the original estimates. We, of course, on this side support the thrust of this bill.

● (1732)

Someone may well ask, however, why we need a comptroller general? In my opinion, we need this super bureaucrat because our ship of state is way off course, and if we continue to follow our present route, our nation will find itself floundering on the rocks of disaster and despair.

In Ottawa today we have a government that ignores or intentionally misreads the lessons of history. Cabinet ministers call for national unity, for public confidence, and for spending restraints. They stand in this House and enunciate noble policies, high principles, and shining goals, but then they forget this high purpose, Mr. Speaker, when the day-to-day political game is played.

The diagnosis of Canada's sickness really does not require prolonged consultations or reference to complex charts. The reasons for our malady can be stated very clearly and very briefly. In the past two years or more we have tried to hide both the symptoms and the sickness like a social disease. We had hoped that our ailment would go away by itself if it could only be hidden or covered up. The truth is that it can only be cured when we expose it, when we recognize it, and deal with it now before more damage is done.

This, I submit to you, sir, is one of the reasons why we need a comptroller general, but I also believe there are others. We are still in the grip of serious inflation—something like 9 per cent annually. We have priced ourselves out of the world markets as well as out of our own markets. We are paying the penalty of high unemployment, again at the expense of our youth where we see admittedly something like 910,000 unemployed, and heaven only knows how many more who are not legally on the record. We are spending recklessly. We are borrowing needlessly, mindlessly. We are committing our children, and our children's children, to a debt for years to come—a debt we do not have the courage to face in our lifetime. We buy the dream of having the highest wage rate in the world, by printing more dollars, by issuing more bonds and by borrowing more money abroad—borrowing it almost on a daily basis now.

We accept almost without a murmur a budget deficit this year that will be as great as was our entire budget when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) came to power. There are younger members of the House who may doubt that statement. They need only look back to the Treasury Board's publication of February 19, 1973, put out then by the Hon. C. M. Drury, President of the Treasury Board. In it you will see some very interesting figures. I hold it in my hand and you will see there listed under 1967-68 the total expenditures for all of Canada. We were a nation at that time of 20 million people. The total budget for all of Canada on that date was \$9,872 million.

On March 31, 1977, the finance minister, Donald Macdonald, called for expenditures for 1977-78 of \$41,900 million, with an estimated deficit of \$7,160 million.

According to the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien), on page 2 of the 1978-79 edition of "How Your Tax Dollar Is Spent", we read the projected total spending is \$44,450 million for 1977-78. Therefore this represents an increase of 8.2 per cent over the total 1976-77 expenditures. I say to you, sir, that it is also \$2,550 million more than was predicted by his predecessor, for a total deficit of some \$9,710 million to service now an estimated 23 million people in Canada.