

Financial Administration Act

who do stay may be few in number but their calibre is very high indeed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: As far as numbers are concerned, it is very like speaking to a group of Liberal supporters in the Crowfoot riding.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baldwin: I was very surprised to hear my good friend from Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) struggle desperately to find some good features about this bill. Only an hon. gentleman with a character like that of my hon. friend who manages to think kind and considerate thoughts, even sometimes about the government, would be able to find some good in a piece of legislation of this kind for the purposes to which it was being assigned in the discussions held in the public accounts committee and the comments made by the previous and the present Auditors General. Mr. Speaker, it is junk. It is nothing.

I understand that the gentleman who is being appointed to this position is a man of a very high calibre. I am glad in many ways but in some ways I am sorry because of the heartaches and frustrations he will have to undergo in trying to fulfil his high responsibilities in the way the public apparently expects of him. Just the other day we had a further example of the government's attitude toward spending. You know, Mr. Speaker, as you watch the leaves drift along the creek, you see which way the current is flowing. Anyway, it now seems that a rag, tag and bobtail bunch from the Treasury benches opposite have gone out to western Canada to engage in what is very obviously a political campaign.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has certainly laid down the foundation for this opinion, and he is known as the conscience of parliament. It is certain that western Canada, along with Canada as a whole, is in desperate need of leadership. I do not need to recite a litany of the problems which face us; we read about them in every paper, we hear about them in every radio broadcast and on each telecast. Here we find ministers and others going out to western Canada on an obvious political mission, though the campaign has not yet commenced, using government aircraft. I think it is a shocking thing. If that is an indication of the government's attitude toward public spending then Heaven help the poor comptroller general.

Recently I was given one or two hints about the way in which the government, and not only the government but principal civil servants, think. I was at a forum the other day dealing with an issue in which I am greatly interested with a distinguished member of the other place, and when the speeches had been made, one of those present rose to ask a question. He was distinguished in appearance and no doubt he was quite sincere. I suppose what he said was in the nature of a statement rather than a question. He said: "Mr. Baldwin, on this question of information and what the government spends and what it does and how it operates, the trouble with this

[Mr. Baldwin.]

country is that people like members of parliament and those who work in the media persist in challenging and questioning decisions made by the government and by the very distinguished and very wise and very efficient professional people who run the country. That is why we are in trouble today."

We are in trouble today, Mr. Speaker, precisely because decisions of the government are not effectively challenged. We should have had a comptroller general for years with the power and authority which we believe should be assigned to him. For years the Auditor General sought desperately to secure the authority he needed while ministers opposite went on spending and taxing, spending and taxing, until they drove the poor people of this country into a state of near desperation. That is an attitude which comes right from the top—it comes right from *numero uno* and goes all the way down.

I put that statement back to back against another statement made in the same place a few months ago when another gentleman, unknown to me but obviously from the public service, said: "Mr. Baldwin, I am very much in sympathy with your views, with your insistence that the government should try to curb expenditures and let the country know what it is doing and why. I want to tell you that in many cases spending programs of one kind or another are in force even before ministers know about them and most of the highly placed members of the public service think parliament is simply an impediment to the operation of this country."

Mrs. Sauvé: So long as we don't, that's okay.

Mr. Baldwin: Don't be too sure of that. The principle of ministerial responsibility to which the hon. lady is possibly referring is dying. I doubt whether it exists for us any more. Today, ministers do not know one per cent of what goes on in their departments. They only know what their senior advisers think it is safe to tell them. They only act as advocates. They only present a departmental brief. They are allowed to appear before committees once in a while. They are allowed to go across the country and they are propped up with information and sent into the House of Commons occasionally to make a speech. This is the principle of ministerial irresponsibility upon which the government functions.

Mrs. Sauvé: I am shocked to hear you say that.

Mr. Baldwin: The hon. lady says she is shocked but the smile she gives me indicates she is not really shocked. She probably believes me. I am going to give her credit because I have a great deal of respect for her. I think she wishes things were otherwise. I think she wishes she belonged to a government—it would have to be a Conservative government—which believes in the principle of ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I might enlighten the hon. member. In the case of the hon. minister to whom he has just been directing his remarks, I can assure him that what he says is not the case. She does know, and makes a point of knowing, exactly what is going on in her department and reports are made to her