

Financial Administration Act

complete the niceties at the start a great deal of time has passed. After two or three committee meetings on the estimates of one department the minister and his cohorts are home free for another year. This makes it rather difficult for members of parliament to be able to hone in on these expenditures, getting the proper answers from the ministers responsible or their officials. I have seen this happen time and time again, and I guess I will see it happen in the future.

Let us hope the Comptroller General will have a free hand and will be able to go into any department, possibly with the advice of members of the opposition, and members of the government the odd time when they are not too enthusiastic about how a department is acting or spending money. If that is the case then the Comptroller General will be doing a good job. I understand he will have the rank and salary of a deputy minister. Let me suggest to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) that it might be a good idea if he paid him on commission in reverse; the more money he saved the more he would be paid. I would like to see the day when he was receiving \$10 million in salary, because he would be earning every cent of it. That may be a thought worthy of consideration.

In conclusion, I should like to say that I certainly support the appointment of a Comptroller General. I add that any measure which will put some sort of check on the government's spending habits is more than welcome. Let me say once more to the President of the Treasury Board that I commend him for finally getting this bill before the House and putting the Comptroller General to work; I understand he will be starting next Monday.

Miss Aileen Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity of speaking in favour of this amendment. The Financial Administration Act dates from 1951 when government programs were much more simple. Since then there have been different views at different times in the country on how best to manage public programs and to ensure accountability in public spending.

In the 1960s, following the Glassco commission, the central controls which previously existed within the Treasury Board were relaxed and the cry was, "let the managers manage". This was very much the attitude of even provincial civil servants in the 1960s when central controls from Treasury Board were certainly very much resisted.

In the expansive mood of the 60s, the emphasis not only in the federal government but in provincial governments too was on creativity. The civil servant who was considered bright, able and promotable was a person who developed exciting new programs which, in a sense, meant spending more money. In the course of all this somewhat visionary activity the fact that the Glassco commission, in addition to saying that the deputy ministers should manage their own departments, had also recommended some financial mechanisms to replace former central control by Treasury Board was somehow overlooked.

When one looks at the United States and Europe during the 1960s, one sees the same emphasis on creating exciting, progressive programs which, of course, cost money, and insufficient emphasis on accounting for this money. At the present time, the pendulum seems to be swinging the other way. We sometimes hear that government spending is bad, and that civil servants are empire builders who must be restrained and supervised. That attitude carried to extremes can be at least as expensive and unintelligent as a laissez-faire attitude toward expenditures from the public purse.

The measure before us is to create the new position of Comptroller General and is based on the recommendation of the Auditor General. The recommendations of the present Auditor General, who not only pinpoints problems but also offers solutions, naturally carry considerable weight. However, the Auditor General has also addressed himself to the question of the need for Canadians to get value for money in auditing.

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At the meeting of the public accounts committee on February 2, the Auditor General estimated that at least \$50 million is spent on government auditing services. The Auditor General's staff has been greatly increased. Treasury Board and the Department of Supply and Services have audit services, and then, of course, there are the various pre-audits within the departments. In this context, the appointment of another financial control office naturally raises the questions of need and effectiveness. Do we need more effective financial control or do we need more effective program audits? Canadians do not like waste in government spending, but neither do we like bureaucratic red tape, and sometimes an over-concern with auditing can strangle programs.

The hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. Martin) expressed surprise that a 15-line bill should occasion so much debate. I do not find it surprising because I think the underlying issue is the size and scope of government spending, an issue on which people have strong and often conflicting opinions. People talk of the need to cut down on government bureaucracy, but the same people also want stronger government action to deal with unemployment.

People talk about the need to free the private sector from control or interference by government, but business also wants government organization, spending and incentives for research and development to help in penetrating foreign markets and so on. Education, manpower planning, pensions, medical care, defence and transportation are all essential areas for government activity if there is to be equality of opportunity, social justice and economic prosperity.

A strong central government is essential for solving the country's problems, and that means big, universal programs and therefore the need for modern and effective financial controls. It is no longer enough that a program be imaginative and idealistic. It must also be carried out in the most effective and economic fashion to achieve national goals. In times of slow economic growth, government must help to take up the