

We are not living back in the days of the cold war or the late 1940s. We still have a problem in respect of national security as every country does, but we have come a long way from those dark days of the 1940s and early 1950s. Surely the government of Canada should set an example for all businesses in this country or anywhere in the world in order to establish good, above-board commercial relations. We do not have to hire unknown agents to sell something that is made in Canada by a Crown corporation, and the obvious evidence is before us. We have misspent millions of dollars because we dealt under the table, not above with good business practices.

It is my hope that the new Comptroller General, Mr. Rogers, will have the power on day-to-day and week-to-week basis to keep the government, departments and ministers informed as to what is going on, and what is right and what is wrong, because that is what this bill is all about. If he is just to be another deputy minister sending reports, not to parliament and not to the public accounts committee, but to the secretary of the Treasury Board, and from him to the President of the Treasury Board, who is sitting across from us now, and then on to the Cabinet, where will this lead? Where is the democracy in that situation and where will it lead us?

Is this office to be another cover-up? Will it hide facts that are embarrassing to the government? What disturbs me about this bill is the lack of regulations. We do not even know what we are voting for. We do not know what will be the powers of the Comptroller General. I hope all members on both sides of the House will address themselves to this matter. I hope that members of the Liberal party who speak later this evening will indicate their concern about the accountability of the Comptroller General.

I visualize accountability in two ways. There is financial, technical accountability, and that is important. That is one thing we are talking about here. We are also talking about another kind of accountability. To whom is the Comptroller General to be accountable in his reports? Will we as members of parliament and as members of the public accounts committee—I am not presently a member but I was—get this information second, third, fourth or fifth-hand after reports from the Comptroller General have gone through the bureaucracy, through the minister's office and through the Cabinet and been watered down? Are we going to get the reports just as quickly as possible so we can raise these issues in the House and ask the various ministers responsible if in fact there has been malpractice as far as financial accountability is concerned in their respective departments or ministries?

We spent a very good afternoon today, although I did not participate in the debate, discussing the question period and whether ministers should or must answer questions. Of course, we know that according to the rules a minister does not have to answer a question if he so desires. If under this bill the Comptroller General is allowed to publicize his facts, figures and statistics and give them to members of the House of Commons, this will enable members on both sides of this House to ask questions and put ministers on the spot so they will have to come up with substantive answers instead of

evasive ones such as those we have been getting for the last, heaven knows how long.

There is an old saying, Mr. Speaker, that "I want value for my money". I suggest that has a very special meaning in relation to this bill. This matter has come up in the Ontario legislature as well as in two or three other legislative assemblies across the country. When the government spends money for the purchase of anything, how do we as members of parliament, who are supposed to have some control over the purse strings of government spending, know whether the government is getting the best deal? When the government orders desks, chairs, rugs, typewriters—I do not care what it is, even pencils for that matter—how do we know we are getting the best value for the taxpayers' dollar? Are there any other members of the House who can actually go to a department head in the Department of Supply and Services and grill him at length? Surely, we can ask a few questions of a minister a couple of times a year, and that is what it amounts to in most cases.

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The problem is that we are keepers of the public Treasury. We are all keepers of the public Treasury, not just the government, the cabinet, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) or the President of the Treasury Board. We are all responsible to our constituents as keepers of the Treasury to make sure that we get value for our money. This is what an intelligent individual Canadian attempts to do when she or he goes out and buys food, furniture or clothing. They want to get value for their money and yet, because of lack of control over our economy, we do not have that information; we do not know whether we are getting value for our money.

Let me go back to where I started out in my address this evening. Even though it is a huge bureaucracy, we should instill in the minds of the senior bureaucrats and all the way down the line that it is the individual taxpayers' money that the government are spending and they should be as careful in spending that money as they themselves would be when buying their groceries. That is the way it should be. We have the taxpayers' money in trust. It is not our money to throw around as members of parliament or as members of the government.

I do not intend to speak much longer, Mr. Speaker, but there is one point I would like to raise which I raised before in another debate, and that is a problem with the public accounts committee. No doubt this relates to other committees as well. I think we have a committee system in this country—I hope that some members on the government side will agree with me on this because I think they feel just as frustrated as we do on this side—that is a sham in many respects, a system that really does not function. We cannot subpoena witnesses. Whenever something happens that is important, or perhaps even catastrophic, something that is significant to the House, how does a member of the opposition, or indeed a backbencher on the government side, go about getting a reference to subpoena witnesses, to have counsel, to have adequate research staff; in other words, to have everything a committee should have? We