

*Financial Administration Act*

request was made to him on Thursday, March 16, and in response he sent over a three-page document which gives us some idea what are the responsibilities of the comptroller general. But those duties are not set out in legislation. They will not be found within the Financial Administration Act. The government at its pleasure will determine those responsibilities. The part I do not like is this: parliament means nothing. We have no say in the matter. The government can lay down what the duties of the comptroller general are to be, and parliament has no role to play.

A dozen or more responsibilities have been laid out. We read, for example:

The Comptroller General would be responsible for the Treasury Board's interest in the following items:

1. Financial Officers—development and maintenance in conjunction with PPB and PSC of training programs for financial officers. Liaison with Personnel Policy Branch concerning the general level of financial staff within the government and with PSC, departments and agencies concerning transfer and promotion of senior financial officers. Representation on selection boards for senior financial positions.

2. Ensuring that internal audit procedures support the Treasury Board Secretariat's audit for compliance.

It goes on and on. Yet who will be in a position to know just what his responsibilities actually are? Mr. Speaker, we shall never know, because those functions can be changed and amended at the whim of Treasury Board. Is this what parliament really wants? I do not think so. The government determines the role of the comptroller general but does not want anything specific to be expressed in legislation. We are hoping that before this debate is over the government will have second thoughts and admit that what the opposition is proposing is capable of working, that it will not be offensive to the principle of the Financial Administration Act or to the responsibilities of ministers. After all, we are breaking new ground, and in these circumstances we ought to do all we can to ensure that the post which is to be brought into being will be effective and that it will carry some clout.

I placed a number of questions on the order paper in an attempt to ascertain just what the Financial Administration Act was all about. In all fairness I must say that the President of the Treasury Board answered my questions, but when I read the answers to two or three of them I became concerned. I found there was a certain amount of confidentiality attached to provisions of the Financial Administration Act which will be passed over to the comptroller general. What disturbs me is that the comptroller general, in terms of analysis, views and reporting, will be involved with matters which are confidential and, as a result, people will never know what is going on. Let me put on record what I had to say in the committee about this aspect, one which I particularly dislike. The relevant part of the record reads as follows—I am quoting from issue No. 10 of Monday, April 3, 1978, Minutes of the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates at page 10:15:

MR. ALEXANDER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I placed some questions on the order paper back in January dealing with the Treasury Board's planning branch—some 19 questions. In two instances I have become a little concerned. You have done an excellent job in terms of answering most of the questions.

[Mr. Alexander.]

The minister was in attendance at that time so I did give him credit for what he had attempted to do. The record continues:

You have indicated that the planning branch terms of reference were to initiate and undertake studies of the effectiveness of selected government programs. When I get to questions such as, "What projects have been undertaken by the planning branch since 1970-71 in fulfilling its mandate?" your answer is: "The information requested refers to internal departmental projects of a confidential nature and cannot be released."

Question 7 is: "Which of these projects have been concerned with ensuring that programs are effective and that the desired results and benefits of the programs are being achieved?" The answer to that is: "The information requested refers to internal departmental projects of a confidential nature and cannot be released."

What is going on, sir, when we are talking about effectiveness?

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): Mr. Reid is Deputy Secretary of the Evaluation Branch which has now taken over this function. This branch will be working with the Comptroller General.

MR. ALEXANDER: Is that the same as the Efficiency Evaluation Branch?

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): Yes.

MR. ALEXANDER: Is that confidential too, sir?

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): I think you have just announced it, Mr. Alexander.

Mr. Reid.

MR. T. REID (DEPUTY SECRETARY, EFFICIENCY EVALUATION BRANCH, TREASURY BOARD): Mr. Chairman, the question is clearly put, and the answer was also quite clear, that in the cases in which the planning branch has done in-depth evaluations inside the Treasury Board Secretariat, those evaluations are done to prepare advice to ministers and that advice is confidential to the department.

That is my point. This is now being taken over by the comptroller general and the whole area will be confidential. Looking at this apparently innocuous bill it seems there are likely to be no problems. But it is dangerous. I continue to read:

MR. ALEXANDER: I see. Now we say that the efficiency evaluation branch, if I understand it, is going to be transferred to the "almost" office of the Comptroller General. Am I to understand then that the efficiency evaluation which will be done by him is as well confidential?

● (1622)

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): In some cases it will be, I think, Mr. Alexander.

MR. ALEXANDER: Well, how are we ever going to know how effective the Comptroller General is, Mr. Minister, when you refuse to spell out his duties by way of legislation and he is taking over a group that is going to be involved with confidential information? All I want to know is, where does a member of parliament happen to come in?

This is the sorry plot that this government is attempting to foist upon the Canadian people. We cannot have it.

There are two reasons why I find this bill offensive, but still I have to go along with it. Hopefully, the comptroller general himself will in due time stand up, be counted, and raise hell. I do not like the fact that the duties of the comptroller general are not spelled out. They are hidden, and he will be working in secret. Because of the devious approach of this government he will be covering up, even if he does not want to do that.

There is a problem regarding confidential information with which the efficiency evaluation branch deals but which will be taken over by the comptroller general. Is this fair, when we are talking about restraint? Is this fair, when we are talking trying