

Financial Administration Act

As an ex-chairman of the public accounts committee my view is that the appointment of a comptroller general which is envisaged by this bill is better than no comptroller general at all. I make no secret of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that some of us are disappointed in that we do not know what the functions of this person and agency will be. We do not know what staff he will have; we do not know what his powers will be. We do not know whether we are being conned by a government, which has a great facility for public relations measures. Sometimes that is all it is, a public relations facade which is imposed upon the Canadian public. We are not skeptical by any means. I am glad that we will have a comptroller general. However, I wish this bill had some meat to it. We have the bones,—the skeleton is there.

We have a person who will be called a comptroller general. I hope he will have the power, authority and the function of a comptroller general as that office is understood throughout the western world and in some of the other Commonwealth democracies. In other countries that person is an independent person. In some cases that person reports, as does the Auditor General, directly to the legislature or to the parliament—directly to the House of Commons. The comptroller general in Canada will not do that.

In some of the other jurisdictions the comptroller general is an all-powerful individual. If he knows that something is clearly going wrong he has the power to stop it. As far as we know the Canadian comptroller general will not have that power. In other jurisdictions the comptroller general has a skilled and extensive staff of investigators and auditors. As far as we know this comptroller general will not have that type of staff or facility available to him. But certainly half a loaf is better than none.

I would have suspected that this government has had enough of financial scandals. For their political survival it is about time that our political masters on the other side of the House realize the growing awareness Canadians have that this government is unwise in many of its spending practices and that the control and supervision of these expenditures have reached an almost scandalous stage.

I am sure every member of this House receives at least two calls per day from constituents and sometimes three or more, not per week, not per month but per day. They may complain about something else which involves large expenditures of taxpayers' money by this government or that an expenditure has not been properly explained or is being improperly carried out. Just this morning I had complaints concerning two brand new offices which have been set up without my knowledge in my riding. I had to read about them in the newspaper. These offices are under the aegis of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, a CCC office, which is a conservation control office of some type or another. One office was set up in the town of Bowmanville and another office was set up in Cobourg, both in my constituency.

Both of these are new offices and new functions under the FLIP program. Each office has a budget for the next couple of months of \$49,000. The genuine concern of my constituents

when they phoned me was stated in terms such as, "What in heaven's name is this that is now coming along and is spending this money?" I will be frank that until I read about this matter in the newspaper I had never even heard of it. I had to get busy and do some research.

The FLIP program, and I am not trying to be flippant about it but that is what it is called, the FLIP program is supposed to be another one of these ad hoc make-work programs over the next few months. The Government of Canada is spending \$150 million of your dollars and my dollars on this type of program. The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources alone is spending about \$50 million of that. A letter which I received from the minister obviously indicates neither he nor his department know the extent of the offices or the amount of money being spent in the riding. Maybe the program will be a good one. But I am skeptical and I have my doubts. We should have someone other than empire builders that exist in the bureaucracy in this country to take a good hard look at this matter, not necessarily from the point of view of the merits or demerits of the program, but to plan ahead how money should be spent.

Once the government has made a decision to go ahead with a plan, the actual method and procedure of hiring people and the spending of the money should be explained first. Canadians would then know whether their money was being genuinely spent on their behalf. We have no such guarantee. I am continually skeptical about what is happening here and I believe my constituents are too. It has been proven time and time again that there is too much waste, too much extravagance, and too much expense. Their money is being thrown around.

For the political survival of the government it seems to me that it would want an independent, powerful individual or institution interposed into the spending procedures of this government who could report to this House. In the long run it would make for better government. It would provide an assurance to the people that plans to spend their money are more wisely devised. It would help members of parliament to be re-elected. I do not think Canadians are that cynical that they do not reward good government. But they will throw their representatives out when there is bad government. A measure of that type would be a good move toward good government, but we simply do not have it.

● (1502)

I welcome the bill. I welcome the office. I welcome the individual. He will certainly have the full support of members on this side of the House in his efforts. No matter what those efforts are, and no matter what the results of those efforts are, it has got to be better than we have now. So we just have to support the concept. I only wish there were some teeth in the bill. I only wish there was some authority to it. I only wish there had been some meaning to it. Perhaps some day soon we shall form a government which will put those powers and that authority into statutory form.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to speak here on Friday afternoon. The members