

*Financial Administration Act*

few years I am certainly pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words on Bill C-10, an act to establish the office of Comptroller General. The person who has been appointed, Mr. Rogers, I understand is a highly qualified and capable man and he certainly will be assuming an important position. No one will deny this, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, in light of past government mismanagement, his will be no small task and we on this side of the House would like to offer him every encouragement in his most difficult task. He will be responsible for assuring proper financial management and control procedures for the various government departments.

I am sure that when the Auditor General uttered his ominous words about the significantly low standard of the quality and effectiveness of the financial management and control systems of departments and agencies of the government of Canada, he was worried about the direction the government was taking in financial management. One year later when he stated that financial conditions had deteriorated to the point of being "grossly inadequate", it was clearly time to institute another check on government accounting that would somehow improve the way the government was managing the Canadian people's money.

The idea of a Comptroller General is a good one. Indeed, it is absolutely necessary if we are ever to regain some control of government spending. But to appoint someone and then deny him responsibilities at the same time is once more the typical government response to problems and solutions. The problem exists. There are solutions to the problem. Yet the government chooses to tackle the problem only half-heartedly. They take the cosmetic approach. They give the appearance of solving the problem. They take the first step and that is all.

Obviously the government agrees to the concept of the role of the Comptroller General. But why are his duties and responsibilities not spelled out in the legislation as well? This matter has been brought to the attention of the House by three or four speakers already. It will certainly be brought up and amendments presented in committee in an attempt to correct this. It appears that the government wants someone to do the job on the one hand, and yet on the other hand it looks as if they do not. It is indeed regrettable that the government chooses not to include his responsibilities in the legislation.

It is also lamentable that parliament will have no control over the role the Comptroller General will play. This is too bad, particularly in light of what the Auditor General had to say in his 1976-77 report. He said:

Small wonder that parliament has lost control of government spending. The MPs scarcely had a fighting chance to get adequate information on the spending they have to approve.

● (2142)

To give parliament some form of control over the role of the Comptroller General would have been an excellent opportunity to improve the position of parliament, especially when it comes to government spending which has deteriorated steadily over recent years. Why is it that the government will only go part way in following up what the Auditor General is recommend-

[Mr. Elzinga.]

ing? The government first hesitated to make the appointment, and then when it did, it did not do it completely or fully.

In light of this I cannot help but wonder about the actual impact the Comptroller General will have. One would have to be very foolish to believe that suddenly the financial woes of the government will be turned around. I am afraid it will take more than one new face to achieve that. It will take a great number of new faces, and probably a whole new government.

In the last ten years we have seen a phenomenal growth in government spending and deficits. Indeed, the budget deficit for this year will be as great as our entire budget when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) came to power. The cost of government has risen by 400 per cent over that ten-year period. I believe it was in the vicinity of \$10 billion and now, as was mentioned earlier, the estimate for this year is \$45 billion; and in all probability when the supplementary estimates are brought in it will be closer to \$48 billion.

The whole depressing saga of government spending is a situation getting worse and worse year by year. Was it only ten years ago that the Prime Minister said that we would be on the way to financial disaster if nothing were done to bring spending under control? These are enlightening words considering the present financial circumstances of the government.

If this government has one philosophy, it is to spend, spend and spend some more. Government in the past ten years has grown too quickly and by too much. The implementation of some form of control mechanism is long overdue. The government philosophy of better late than never has prevailed once more. A better philosophy would be better never late. In other words, it should have been introduced some while back.

I suggest it is too late to implement the effective control Canadians all over the country would like to see regarding how their tax dollars are being spent and will be spent in the future. It is too late because the pattern has been established. The people of Canada have watched their taxes go up and up to support the government in its ten-year spending spree. The tax burden of the average Canadian family has increased by 239 per cent over the 1961-75 period. What has happened in the last ten years or so could rightly be called the great Canadian tax tragedy.

The phenomenal amount of waste that has been occurring in the last ten years will not be stopped overnight. It is to be hoped that the Comptroller General will be able to operate with as much responsibility and as smoothly as is humanly possible within the bureaucracy. The plain unadulterated truth is that we have been spending and spending.

I have served on several committees, and I have heard it mentioned that committees are not working as well as they should. Perhaps the members themselves could help the committees work a little better, and I say that with all due respect. I attended a committee meeting which was called for 9.30 this morning, but proceedings did not get under way until about 20 minutes to 11. That was an absolute disgrace. When members of parliament do get an opportunity to debate the estimates, two hours in many cases is not sufficient. By the time you