

Financial Administration Act

The second question to which I would like to refer is No. 45. The matter dealt with in this question should concern hon. members on both sides because it is very serious. It has to do with the fingerprinting of public servants. This has been going on for months and months and, in fact, several years under this government, yet no one on the government side has seen fit to do anything but admit that it is going on. My question asks how many have been fingerprinted and why they are being fingerprinted. It asks about people who are outside security sensitive positions such as positions in the Department of National Defence and so forth. Why is this going on among people who are not in security positions? What are the numbers involved, and why is this House not being told of this situation?

There is an invasion of privacy involving thousands of public servants. The government is well aware that many refused to be fingerprinted, yet nothing is forthcoming.

I am surprised that members of the free press of this country have not gone after the government for not doing something about this situation and for not making the reasons public.

I conclude by asking the parliamentary secretary not to give a general answer but to refer specifically to questions Nos. 45 and 54 and to tell me when the answers will be forthcoming.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I shall find out whether questions Nos. 45 and 54 are those which the hon. member mentioned today.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

● (1512)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISH OFFICE OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL

The House resumed, from Friday, April 28, consideration of the motion of Mr. Cullen (for Mr. Andras) that Bill C-10, to amend the Financial Administration Act, be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, when the debate ended on Friday I had been responding to my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to President of Treasury Board (Mr. Lefebvre), with respect to the difficulties that we in this House have with respect to inspecting, controlling, and superintending, in the way that the House of Commons has

[Mr. Cossitt.]

always intended that it be done, the expenditures of government. I will not repeat the arguments which I advanced at that time because I know the parliamentary secretary is very anxious to have the debate conclude within a reasonable time, an anxiety which, I want to assure him, is shared on all sides of the House. Hon. members are free to read the remarks I made at that time.

A number of things have occurred in the House since the introduction of Bill C-10 and the comments made in the second reading debate on the bill which bring to mind just how important is the position of the comptroller general. For instance, let me refer to the case of the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) and of a public servant, Mr. Larry Stopforth, a case which Mr. Stopforth won in the courts of law wherein he was awarded not an unreasonable amount in damages for libel, through repetition of a statement about that gentleman's professional performance, made in the House of Commons, for which the minister was found liable to pay both damages and costs. The case is now subject to appeal and, therefore, I make no comments on the merits of the matter, but what is important with respect to that case, so far as the use of the public money is concerned, particularly because of the nature of the case, is that there seems no way in which it could be reasonably found that a minister of the Crown, in the course of libelling one of his public servants, could be held to have been acting within his authority, and therefore, by tradition, custom or otherwise, have his damages paid out of the public purse. It is one thing to defend him; it is quite another to go that far and to indicate that one is prepared to go that far.

This is important because it calls into play the whole question of ministerial responsibility. Surely there has to be some action somewhere with respect to a minister of the Crown regarding what he does in relation to the operations of his department or in relation to the position he takes in so far as his public servants are concerned.

What happened to Mr. Stopforth as a result of what has now been judiciously found to be a wrong in terms of the description of what he did? He was found not to have been grossly negligent by a court of law. What happened was that this highly placed public servant, who asked only for the privilege of serving his country with the skills and the expertise that were his, has now found himself doing work that does not occupy or challenge either his intellect, training, or ability. Notwithstanding the fact that questions have been raised in the House about the matter, the position of that public servant and how he has been treated by the Government of Canada—that is where it lies because it was a minister of the Crown who maligned him—are a travesty that no right-thinking member of the House of Commons should tolerate for one moment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): But this government is prepared to tolerate it and, while tolerating it, is prepared to say that, in the unequal balance between its resources in the legal sense and the resources of a public servant in his private