

*Auditor General*

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I should like to re-establish in the minds of Canadians the credibility of the Public Accounts Committee. It happens too often that one relies on the sayings of an Auditor General whose mandate has ended, and not enough attention is given to the work of the present Auditor General and that of the committee. It is a known fact, Mr. Speaker, that since the beginning of this Parliament, the Public Accounts Committee has already submitted a first report and is now drafting a second one. This second report, Mr. Speaker, is being drafted following submission of the second report of the Auditor General on March 31, 1974. Since the beginning of April, the committee for public accounts studied ten paragraphs of the report of the Auditor General for the financial year ending in 1974; I think it should be able to table its report within the next two weeks.

That is to say, then, Mr. Speaker, that since the start of the 30th Parliament, that committee has already brought the House two reports. If there was no agreement between the members of the committee to accelerate the work, to avoid partisan attacks, to attempt to diversify the work of the committee by bringing discussions to the table bearing on various subjects, I doubt that we could be as proud as we are today of the work of the committee.

Still, Mr. Speaker, I must point out that the attendance of the committee members during this Parliament is not what it should have been. For instance, I must mention to the hon. member for Roberval (Mr. Gauthier) that his party has failed completely to show up for the work of the committee since the opening of this Parliament.

I should also point out to the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that his party is very seldom represented. It is too bad, because each time we had to rely on a colleague of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, he always raised pertinent questions which could be included as recommendations in our report. I would therefore hope, Mr. Speaker, that this party will be more assiduous from now on.

I would also make the same comment, Mr. Speaker, about the two main parties in the House. The proceedings of this committee often cannot be immediately concretized in recommendations because we do not have quorum. Thus, for example, when we agreed with the Auditor General that a special meeting would be held on October 12, we had to wait to get a quorum while the whips went to fetch some of their colleagues who were sitting on different committees.

I deplore the fact, especially since the members opposite have loudly brought forward the issue of the credibility of the proceedings in the Public Accounts Committee. If they are so anxious to criticize the government administration, they should be the first ones to sit in majority on this committee. Well, I say so, Mr. Speaker, and without any partisan thought, that has never been the case since the beginning of this 30th Parliament. And I deplore it all the more so that the business of this committee is conducted, I think, as I said earlier, in a nonpartisan manner.

● (2150)

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker—and this has been mentioned directly in the Wilson Commission Report—that the Auditor General's Office has experienced

[Mr. Joyal.]

considerable changes since Mr. James Macdonell has been appointed. I want to point out also the excellent work accomplished by Mr. Macdonell in the public accounts committee.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the Middle Ages there was a saying that when a new monarch was crowned in replacement of one who had died or had resigned, the palace had to be redecorated. Sometimes, that was done to the accompaniment of drums and trumpets, but some other times, it was done in a silent manner, but not less efficiently. I believe that is the course Mr. Macdonell has chosen to follow when he took up his duties.

For instance, when his predecessor, Mr. Henderson took office, 10 per cent of the staff in the Office of the Auditor General were professionals. When he left, half were professionals a quarter of which were chartered accountants, members of Canadian acknowledged institutions. On the other hand, the report of the Wilson Commission stated that out of 395 authorized positions in the office of the Auditor General, only 290 had been filled.

Of course, Mr. Macdonell could have assumed his post, made profound statements, awakened interest in mass media, solicited interviews with newspapers, radio and television stations and attempted to make a fuss about the lack of personnel in the Office of the Auditor General. Such was not the case, Mr. Speaker, he was rather efficient. I am surprised that members of the opposition failed to point this out.

Judging from what the previous speakers said, most of them did not read the Auditor General's report for the year ending March 31, 1975. The hon. member for Leeds in particular most certainly did not read paragraphs 70 and 71. Mr. Speaker, these paragraphs do not deal directly with shortcomings or breakdown in government administration. It is much more general. It is a study on financial administration and control.

This paragraph would authorize the Auditor General to carry out a thorough investigation into the financial administration and control of each and every department and Crown corporation. With his personnel of 290 people, the Auditor General would certainly have been unable to complete this study to which he refers in his report for March 31, 1975, without the assistance of additional personnel. What did he do? Did he call a press conference? Did he complain on TV or on the radio about his lack of personnel? No, Mr. Speaker, he was a lot more resourceful. What did he do? He met the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, as stated in his report on page 75, and asked to take part in the public service executive transfer program.

What is this program all about? It is quite simple. It is a program which permits a department or a Crown agency to call directly upon the private sector and request for the government the personnel who could be associated to an assignment or particular duties. The Chairman of the Public Service Commission agreed to the Auditor General's request, so that 19 accounting firms throughout Canada were called upon to provide the Auditor General with the additional personnel.