

about the matter of accountability. These matters have been in our minds.

The report last year of the Auditor General has been continually discussed, and this has heightened concern in the matter. We have been searching for the proper vehicle, in light of this concern, to avoid an over-reaction in bringing the pendulum back, and there had to be a new look. Incidentally, it has been 15 years since Glassco examined government organization in these matters. For all these reasons we thought, having looked at the various ways this could be done, there should be a royal commission. Out of courtesy to the Auditor General, however, and with the knowledge that the report would be tabled at or about the end of the month, or just about now, we decided that we would wait until the report had been made public and available to the House before we announced the royal commission. It is that simple. There was no plot to restrict the public accounts committee. I do not see how that could be the interpretation. Perhaps I have missed the point of the hon. member's presentation.

Certainly, the examination of accounts, the examination of the systems and the whole range of these things will go on. The public accounts committee is master of its procedures, and there is nothing in the setting up of the royal commission which will inhibit it. The royal commission will take an objective, stand-back look, and if the hon. member reads the terms of reference it will become apparent to him that this is a wise move.

The last two questions asked by the hon. member were really one and the same, if I understood them properly. I gather the new public accounts committee for this session had its organizing meeting last Thursday or Friday. I was informed of the results of that today, and I congratulate the hon. member for having been made chairman, and another hon. member from this side, who is not now in the House for having been made vice-chairman. I understand that the committee arranged a new and interesting procedure for a lock-in. That is an indication that the public accounts committee is in command of its own procedures. The possible implications of the changes are very interesting to me, but I must say to the hon. member that I do not know what they are yet. I look forward with great interest to knowing what they are.

Mr. Speaker: There are now four other hon. members who want to ask questions, and we have been going for quite some time on this statement. However, in fairness I will see the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn), the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro), and the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Bawden). I think that ought to conclude the questions, and I think those are all the hon. members who have been seeking the floor.

● (1600)

Mr. Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, I have two big questions. First of all, I share the minister's concern that by establishing an office of comptroller general there might be the possibility of even further removing parliamentary responsibility or some

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kind of control over government expenditures. If and when a comptroller general is established and is directly responsible to a committee of this House, would that not be the same thing as an auditor general or any other top government official who would be directly responsible to the House of Commons through a new standing committee?

Now my second question, Mr. Speaker, and I do not wish to misinterpret anything here. I saw the name, Oliver Gerald Stoner, mentioned. I do not know the gentleman, and I am not imputing anything improper, but I am wondering about the propriety of choosing a man who has been so closely linked with cabinet and is at the present time apparently deputy minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. I wonder if it was a wise decision by the minister and the government to choose this man, however capable, competent and effective he may be.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, the first question is wrapped in some of the others and the answers I have made. I think the hon. member illustrates the dilemma. He suggests the possibility of the comptroller general being an officer of parliament, reporting to a committee of parliament. That is one version, and it is a version which in my conversations with the Auditor General, limited as those have been because of my short sojourn over there, I think he and others have been working on. The report before us today, however, talks about the office as being a deputy minister equal to the secretary to the Treasury Board, reporting to the President of the Treasury Board.

That is quite a different version than was suggested by the hon. member, and I think it illustrates exactly what our dilemma is—where this officer fits in terms of his responsibilities. It highlights the dilemma and the need to get this matter properly defined, not in a straight line of efficiency, important as that is, but in relation to parliament and the whole accountability system of deputy ministers and, interdepartmentally, to the various agencies.

With regard to Mr. Stoner, in my personal view he is extremely competent. At the moment he is deputy minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. I think it would be a very serious lack if there were not somebody on this commission fully experienced within the government of Canada who is able to identify the practical situations that one must face in government in this area of accountability of deputy ministers to minister, minister to the Prime Minister and his colleagues.

Mr. Stoner is one of four gentlemen, and I think an examination of their biographies will show there is a wide range of compatibility and ability to work together. They are fairly well selected and I think will make a good royal commission. I do not think I can go further with regard to the individuals on the commission at this time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski).

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, the minister pointed out that there had not been a comprehensive review of government operations since 1952 but, as the Auditor General pointed out,