

Parliament

During these 15 years the government has become the principal supplier of a growing number of services such as health care, education, and pensions. I believe the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has mentioned this. It has assumed major responsibilities in the area of direct income transfer payments. In addition, we have found this government increasingly intruding into the private sector, with more and more of the means of producing goods and services being controlled by the state. This expansion of programs and services has caused a massive increase in public sector expenditure.

During this period of rapid expansion and development of new programs, the federal government has failed to implement acceptable standards of control and accountability within the system. Taxpayers in the private sector, who are accountable at all times to the tax collector, quite naturally assumed that some degree of accountability would exist over the tax spenders. In the thirtieth parliament the examination of the Auditor General's report by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has shown that the financial management and control of the tax resource by the federal government, its departments, agencies and Crown corporations, has been significantly below acceptable standards of quality and effectiveness.

In addition of the failure of the government to implement the second key recommendation of the Glassco commission, other fundamental causes for the present conditions can be identified. The cash base method of appropriating funds and accounting for them has encouraged a degree of gamesmanship to develop within the system which works against good resource management and accountability. One merely has to work diligently on the committees to watch the gamesmanship that is exercised against the members of this House. An increasing reliance on post audit procedures for control and performance measurement has emerged and can be largely attributed to parliament's failure to put in place a system of satisfactory examination of the estimates and a meaningful control over supply votes. A further condition which can be identified is that the isolated work experience of the public servants has separated its processes and values from those found in the private sector.

One might ask how does one get their arms around \$50 billion, or how does one tackle this huge problem? I think that within the answer to the question lies the challenge of the public accounts committee. In the thirtieth parliament the public accounts committee has gained a grasp of the problem and is in the process of adjusting its approach to meet the challenge ahead. The public accounts committee is doing a moderately good job with regard to the Auditor General's report, but it has failed completely in its responsibility to undertake proper examination of the public accounts of Canada. Unfortunately, it has neither the time nor the staff to meet this mandate.

It is essential to the parliamentary system that the performance of the Auditor General be continuously appraised by the public accounts committee. It is also essential that government departments, agencies and Crown corporations, continue to

[Mr. Huntington.]

have the public accounts committee forum in which they either defend their positions, gain publicity for their needs, or report that corrective measures are in place. Only with this type of public examination can the faults within the system be corrected and the interests of the already overburdened taxpayer be protected.

In his 1978 annual report at paragraph 1.43, the Auditor General describes three of the important pillars supporting economical, efficient and effective management. These are essential to the process ahead of us, and I would recommend that all hon. members read that section. It is the foundation upon which progress from this point on has to be made. Unfortunately time does not allow me to expand on that particular section of the report.

As we mature from the horror-story approach to assuring the implementation of the three pillars in section 1.43 of the Auditor General's report, I would like to say a few words on the challenge facing the public accounts committee. Members who have examined the last four reports of the committee should be aware of the challenge facing the committee of the change that is taking place and the quality of their work. The government-wide issue approach of the Auditor General demands a new approach and a new quality of performance, or we risk losing all potential benefits from the tremendous energy and talent that is behind the Auditor General's report. Parliament must examine, must understand the issues, and must create a pressure cooker for those elements in the system that resist coming to heel and being accountable.

The public accounts committee is the only window through which parliament can examine the economic, the efficiency, and the systems ability to deliver effectiveness. Within this area, the public accounts committee will have its hands full on government-wide issues alone. There is a new standard demanded of its members, who even now must attend briefing sessions before going to the meetings. The detailed examination of departments, agencies and Crown corporations, and the cyclical comprehensive audits that are ahead, will have to be undertaken by other committees of the House.

There is just no time for the public accounts committee to handle that aspect of the Auditor General's report. It will require a new type of research which, I believe, will have to be provided by a fortified research arm of the public accounts committee, and as we come to it, by the research arm which will study the estimates. A new strong committee, similar and parallel to the public accounts committee, will be necessary to study the pre-expenditure end of the continuum.

With pressure of examination on at the beginning of the spending process and with the pressure of a strong, well-armed post expenditure audit committee, at the end, I believe that the attitudes, behaviour and the management within the system can be turned around. I have been honoured to be sitting as the chairman of the public accounts committee through the third session of this thirtieth parliament, and now into the fourth session. I have become sensitive to some of the weaknesses which exist within that committee. It is an essential arm of this body and is needed to bring about some of the changes