

link. He was reported to have said that the people of Canada will decide with regard to our future relations with NATO. What unparalleled effrontery from this Prime Minister who bears almost sole responsibility for diminishing our association and influence with our partners in the Atlantic alliance! Canada did have influence and friendship after the last war, not because of our puny diplomacy but purchased solely with the blood and lives of Canadians.

Mr. Hees: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: Not so long ago I had occasion to stand by the beautiful cemetery at Nijmegen, which the people of Holland keep green and trim in honour of the Canadians who lost their lives there, many of them my comrades, and as I thought of the extent to which our influence and prestige has been diminished it struck me that many of the people in those graves would be resting uneasily. This prestige has been dissipated by the perverse and personal decisions by those at the top. These are not the decisions of people of Canada, not the decisions of this House but the decisions of the Prime Minister and his immediate associates. Now we are treated to the ludicrous spectacle of the right hon. gentleman crawling around from capital to capital in Europe trying to repair the damage he did. I say it is almost obscene to suggest that the Canadian people had anything to do with either of these decisions. What was done was done at the very top of our power structure.

As I said, because of the tyranny of the clock I will leave to others the charges that this government has abused its great power by the stand it has taken in refusing to divulge information and making a secret society of executive government even more difficult to penetrate, its equally medieval attitude that civil servants are exempt from having to appear as witnesses at parliamentary committees at the arbitrary discretion of ministers, and the farce of the so-called examination and scrutiny of estimates.

I would like to take some time—a short time because we do not have too much time to spend on this today—to deal with the office of the Auditor General and what ought to be done when, after years of bickering about the powers, authority and effectiveness of this office, the government having been presented with a very objective and well buttressed series of recommendations by the independent committee for the review of the office of the Auditor General, has intimated that it has no intention of acting, certainly not in the near future, on these proposals, nor has it indicated if or when it will accept them. It has gone as far as refusing to allow a committee of this House or of parliament to study the report and to make recommendations.

This follows applications I made in this House under Standing Order 43 and questions I asked of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp). I understand that there are some hon. gentlemen opposite who are sensitive. The Minister of Public Works (Mr. Drury), for many years president of the treasury board, is very sensitive indeed about the Auditor General and the powers of the Auditor General. I know that he was one of the ministers who led the fight and who is probably still leading the fight to see

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that this country and this parliament does not have an effective, useful and meaningful Auditor General's office and legislation to implement such a proposal.

Let us see what happened in this regard. As the power of this House has diminished with regard to meaningful examination and scrutiny of estimates, we are driven back to the final line of defence of the beleaguered taxpayer of Canada, the office of the Auditor General. Commencing some years ago in the late forties and fifties, the then Auditor General, Mr. Watson Sellar, considered that the limited provisions of the legislation found in the Financial Administration Act not only authorized but probably compelled him to examine what he ultimately defined as being non-productive payments.

I say to the House that the Auditor General is not just a financial auditor. He is a parliamentary auditor and he has the very high duty to examine payments which have been made by the executive and by civil servants to see that they follow precisely the limitations and the bases upon which they were passed by the House of Commons and by this parliament. Mr. Sellar felt that the wording of the terms of the Financial Administration Act justified him in going to the point of saying that there were certain payments which may well have followed the prescribed route which was set out by the parliament of Canada, but because they produced no obvious or apparent benefits to the people of Canada, they should be called non-productive payments and should be listed in the Auditor General's report to the House of Commons, and he suggested perhaps the government should take a look at them.

This practice was followed by Mr. Sellar's successor, Mr. Maxwell Henderson, who was appointed by the government of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). I would point out to those hon. members who have said from time to time that Mr. Henderson was taking a biased and political stance that some of the first and most difficult decisions he had to make as Auditor General involved expenditures and problems which had been created and were arising out of the then Conservative government. I think some of my friends will remember the time when Mr. Henderson demanded three income tax files because he felt obliged to examine them for the purpose of his report.

● (1710)

I say to members of the House that in the course of his duties, Mr. Henderson was an officer of parliament in the highest traditions who carried out his task in the very best way possible on behalf of the people of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Henderson raised this issue in 1960 and 1961 with the then public accounts committee on which there was a Conservative majority. It was headed by a chairman who later became Speaker of this House and who is now a senator—Senator Macnaughton. The committee made a finding that it was incumbent upon the Auditor General to examine all so-called payments of a non-productive nature; his duty was to report to the House in respect of such payments and in particular to ascertain if they were in fact payments which conferred any benefit or value to the people of Canada.