

*Oral Questions*

of the lack of a full and ongoing survey by the Atomic Energy Control Board for possible radioactive contamination at Elliot Lake and other communities in Canada, the lack of disclosure of recent test results by the AECB in Elliot Lake and the threat to human health as a result of the negligence of this government agency, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom):

That this House instruct the government to institute a special judicial inquiry into the activity and competence of the Atomic Energy Control Board.

**Mr. Speaker:** Such a motion would require unanimous consent pursuant to Standing Order 43. Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. Members:** No.

## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

### GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

#### REQUEST FOR EXPLANATION OF CRITICISM OF ACCOUNTING PRACTICES BY AUDITOR GENERAL

**Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question to pose to the President of the Treasury Board: it arises out of yet another in the continuing series of specific criticisms advanced by the Auditor General in connection with the government's financial management and control practices. Having regard to the latest revelations in the public accounts of Canada, volume one, in connection with the government's accounting practices, may I ask the hon. gentleman whether he will provide to the House a full explanation with reference to this latest condemnation of the government by the Auditor General and will he, specifically, explain the questionable practice of including uncollectable loans to Crown corporations and foreign states so as to overstate the government's financial picture, all of which is tantamount to cooking the books by \$7 billion, thereby misleading parliament and the people of Canada?

**Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board):** The hon. member, in his excitement, has rather overstated the case; I think that in his own mind, he knows this. The loans to the Canadian National Railways, the Harbours Board and the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority represent investments in capital facilities which are of great importance. They certainly contribute in a vital manner to the transportation facilities of Canada. In every one of those cases it was hoped that those improved facilities would result in an increased economic return which would service the debt. In any case, the primary purpose of the loan has been served. Most certainly, one could not argue that. We had to provide harbours where they were needed. The new waterway was required and it has been beneficial to the country. I do not think anyone would argue that it is not important to maintain and expand the CNR.

[Mr. Symes.]

The issues raised by the Auditor General have been raised in earlier reports from his office and, as a result, it was included among the studies of the accounts of Canada carried out by the Treasury Board. As a result of that study, participated in by the public accounts committee, attempts have been made to rationalize those accounts with respect to these loans.

The Auditor General also makes comments about the loans to the Unemployment Insurance Commission which is a different matter altogether. It is not in the same class as the others because repayment is made in the immediate following year. So, Mr. Speaker, these are accounting problems that have been recognized for a long, long time which do not lend themselves to very easy or simplistic solutions.

**Mr. Mazankowski:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly not one to argue with the professional views and opinions of the Auditor General. I think it is significant that he saw fit to include these rather questionable practices in his report. It is quite obvious from the remarks of the minister that—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. If the hon. member has a question, would he please come to it?

**Mr. Mazankowski:** My supplementary question is this, Mr. Speaker. Since the evidence of the Auditor General and indeed the answer of the President of the Treasury Board clearly reaffirms the fact that the accounting practices of this nation are out of control, and indeed are undermining parliament's authority and distorting the government's true financial picture—

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mazankowski:** —might I ask the President of the Treasury Board whether he will now personally intervene to examine the progress of the implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations which were advanced in his latest report, and would he tell the House precisely what is happening to these recommendations? Because it is quite obvious from information that we have, and from information contained herein, that clearly the recommendations are not being implemented in accordance with the agreement that was undertaken by the President of the Treasury Board, and indeed by the former President of the Treasury Board. Would the minister undertake to clean up the mess that was left by his predecessor and his predecessor's predecessor?

**Mr. Andras:** Mr. Speaker, I think I did reply in essence to the hon. member's question the other day when I indicated that we do, of course, take the recommendations and indeed the criticisms of the Auditor General very seriously indeed. We recognize the need for improvement in both the method and facilities of financial control and management. This is something that I am taking under my wing and to which I am giving very high priority. In due course, of course, the measures to implement corrective action on all these fronts will be made known to the House.