

Oral Questions

Mr. Andras: This would begin to change the accountability picture, not in straight terms of financial management and control, as significant and as desirable as those are, but it could possibly challenge the whole structure of parliamentary responsibility, ministerial responsibility to parliament and the rights of members of this House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andras: It is for that reason we believe that the royal commission now has to objectively address itself to the interrelationship of this very appealing recommendation and the complexities it creates in that process.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, since the Auditor General has stated in his report that the system he proposes is fully compatible with maintenance of the decentralized authority of deputy heads as proposed by the Glassco Commission, is the minister now saying he disputes the Auditor General and is challenging the analysis and recommendation of the Auditor General in this very important area?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if the hon. member reads what I just said in answer to the question a minute ago he will see that the answer is no. The answer is that a very profound recommendation has been made to us along a certain line, and that it obviously and desirably is based on clear accounting and financial control.

However, it does have other implications which the Auditor General was not required or called upon to consider, nor did he address them, and that is the interrelationship between the accountability in this House and the whole system as we now understand it. That has to be examined before we take action. I would say that I think we could accomplish almost all the required changes and improvements within the structure which now exists and, indeed, when we get the findings of the royal commission about this other matter then we can take whatever steps are necessary to study it on a wide basis.

An hon. Member: Another study.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, the minister has obviously admitted that the government has failed to incorporate the recommendations of the Glassco Commission.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

POSSIBILITY OF ACTION TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
OF AUDITOR GENERAL PRIOR TO REPORT OF ROYAL
COMMISSION

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the President of the Treasury Board, who has now announced what in effect is a three-year stall of any dramatic change in the procedures of accounting of this government, procedures which the Auditor General has

called, using very deliberate language, "grossly inadequate". I want to ask the minister what action the government intends to take, during the three-year stall when he tries to have this matter taken out of public debate and out of the hands of Parliament, to correct the procedures which the Auditor General of Canada has described as grossly inadequate.

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I suggested yesterday that I could take an hour and a half in the House to lay on the record what I tabled the other day. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that his time and the time of this House might be better used if he would take the time to read this progress report.

SUGGESTED ADDITION TO TERMS OF REFERENCE OF
COMMISSION INQUIRING INTO RECOMMENDATIONS OF
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, instead of taking an hour and a half of the time of this House, the time span in which the minister is interested is three years of stalling and delay to get away from this important question. Since he will not tell us what he intends to do, and since he will not allow any kind of reform until the stall is finished, will the minister tell us whether he is prepared to add to the terms of reference of this royal commission, with which we appear to be stuck instead of the kind of action and reform which is needed, a specific term of reference which will ensure that the question of parliamentary and public access to all information necessary to ensure proper and true accountability is included. Will that be done?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): That is further evidence that the hon. gentleman has not read the progress report because in that progress report—

An hon. Member: Bureaucratic jargon.

Mr. Andras: If it is bureaucratic jargon, some of it comes from the hon. member because part of it is the recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee which we are honouring. Let us call a spade a spade. Of all the recommendations made by the Auditor General, 98 per cent with which we agree and are implementing, there is only one issue and that is the one which gets into the area of accountability, the whole process of reporting to Parliament and the responsibility of ministers. If hon. members want to take away from ministers the responsibility to answer to this House then they had better make that decision.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, let us call a stall a stall. Will the minister now give us a firm commitment that there will be added to those terms of reference of that royal commission a provision which will ensure there will be adequate access by the parliament and public of Canada to the information that is necessary to ensure a true accounting.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. That is the question the minister just answered.