

*Motions*

goal the simplification of the staffing process to make it more accessible to line managers, while respecting the basic principles of merit and equity.

I am interested in some of the comments of the Public Accounts Committee with respect to what has been implemented. I note that the Auditor General suggested that monitoring of the departmental staffing activities by the commission was practically non-existent. The commission agreed that its organization was not sufficient in this area, that it did not effectively integrate monitoring information gathered from the departments and that it made inadequate use of this information.

While we have a system in place, the Auditor General is telling us that there are problems with it. I am pleased that apparently before the committee the commission suggested it was taking remedial measures to augment and centralize its monitoring activities. There is no question that in a variety of government departments there has to be an ongoing effort made to review what standards are used in each department and ministry and to compare and to continue to try to get the very best system that we can.

● (1330)

That brings me to the importance of the merit principle. There is no question that the merit principle must be addressed and I may wish to return to that in a moment. However, if I may, I would like to move on to affirmative action.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, our Party is very strongly in favour of affirmative action. During this session we passed a Bill to implement affirmative action in employment. I am sure opposition Members felt that the Bill could be better, but there was no question that all Members of the House felt that this was a first step—perhaps not a big enough first step, but it was a first step toward implementing a very important principle.

By the same token, there has to be extensive and effective monitoring of the Departments' performance by the commission. In reading the report I noted with interest that the committee was not satisfied with the evidence the commission provided, and pointed out that progress in the hiring of women, visible minorities and the handicapped had been unacceptably slow and the monitoring procedures put in place by the commission did not appear to be adequate to the task. I know that no Hon. Member wants to accept the continuance of that particular problem.

While we may have some differences of opinion as to how to implement affirmative action, there is no question that we all stand for its progress. If that progress is not coming fast enough, the Public Service Commission must take a hard look at the recommendations of the committee, one of which was that by September 30 there will be a written report on the progress of the committee in improving its monitoring of Department staffing procedures.

One of the things to which the committee pointed that I noticed when I was on the Public Accounts Committee was a breakdown in the followup the Departments should do when

looking at the recommendations of the Auditor General and consulting with his office. Recommendations were made by the Auditor General, but I often felt unsure that there was any consultation with his office to make sure that the problem would actually be corrected.

I am concerned about the part of the report which states that the committee was astounded when one government agency informed the committee that one of the most serious obstacles to good management is the current staffing system. I think that is a startling comment to make. It is a comment that does not speak to effective management. If we have that kind of a problem, I think it must be resolved.

The committee states that the average time it took to staff a position ranged from 136 to 160 days and the committee considers that this is far too long. There is absolutely no question that this is far too long a time to staff positions in any department of the Public Service. In departments where there have been administrative reforms, such as the Department of Agriculture, there are instances of staffing time being cut to 44 days. This was done in full compliance with the rules of the commission. I think that points out that it can be done. We have to urge that there be an action plan for the entire Public Service so that we can reduce in every department the average amount of time required to staff a position while taking care to ensure that we maintain the employees' legal rights.

I also wanted to point out that there are some problems in the division of responsibilities between the Treasury Board Secretariat and the commission. There was an earlier recommendation from July 30, 1982 that the Public Accounts Committee review this division of responsibilities between the Treasury Board Secretariat and the commission, and that these agencies resolve problems involving a lack of clarity and overlapping responsibilities. In this case the committee found that the agencies had failed to implement the recommendation in so far as the commission's auditing mandate is concerned. That is what I referred to earlier in my speech when I mentioned that recommendations of the committee are not implemented. I can say without hesitation on behalf of every Member who has ever served on the Public Accounts Committee, no matter of which Party, that that is very annoying.

The Public Accounts Committee reviews at length the reports of the Auditor General. Its members put a layman's imprint on it. We look at the comprehensive audit from the point of view of our constituents and ask how they would feel about it if they had to make recommendations. We put a lot of time and effort into these Public Accounts Committee reports, and if a recommendation is made the committee members feel that the Department involved ought to put a real effort into making sure the recommendation is followed. In its tenth report, the committee said that it expected the agencies to resolve this problem without further delay and ensure that a clear-cut division of responsibilities is established, and I endorse that position.

The Auditor General took a look at the Public Service Commission's program for audit staffing and was concerned