

*Financial Organization and Accountability*

esteemed and noted professional chartered accountant, our present Auditor General. I shall conclude by saying that so far as I am concerned, the postponement of the establishment of a comptroller general is nothing but a cheap, political, Liberal cop-out.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse):** Mr. Speaker, I would not want to expand my comments on the minister's statement. However I must say that I am fairly surprised by the news of the establishment of a royal commission, as announced this afternoon.

As to the first objective, they say the inquiry reflects the extent to which this government shares the Auditor General's concern, as expressed in his report to the House of Commons for the year 1975-76. Unless I am mistaken the minister stated that his predecessor said that he agreed on 22 of the 34 recommendations of the Auditor General on March 9, 1976 and that he would have approved 10 other recommendations afterwards. So this would be 32 out of 34. Since the commission has been established, must we conclude that the two points which have been retained by the government are so important that they do not want to implement them and that the commission will be established to play for time?

In my opinion, the Auditor General makes a very good job, as I already said, but he is not provided with enough tools to do a better performance. To avoid the difficulties the Auditor General meets in his job, he suggests the appointment of a Comptroller General of Canada, not the establishment of a royal commission of inquiry.

In my opinion a royal commission is needed when we are faced with a major problem and no solution is known. It is not so in the current situation because I think the Auditor General of Canada, given his authority under an act of Parliament, has the necessary powers to make an efficient audit in any area of the public administration. But it happens that it is the habit of the government to establish inquiry commissions to investigate the reports of commissions making reports on such and such matter.

We recall for instance the Senate Commission on Poverty in Canada which cost millions of dollars. They went everywhere in Canada to find out if there were any poverty. Finally the chairman and his colleagues made a report which is well known in the House and within the public, a very important report which contains excellent recommendations which are not being implemented because this government does not share the commissioners' views. If after the inquiry launched today the government does not share the views of the Commission this report will be another one which will stay in the parliamentary library and remain unused.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I am a little amazed about that and I felt I had to mention it. While the government is imposing a restriction program, while it wants to save and reduce expenses, I think that this commission will add to government expenditures, that it will cost a lot since we have already a service which could do exactly the same thing and

[Mr. Blackburn.]

arrive at the same conclusions if the government wanted to apply the recommendations of the Auditor General's report.

Did the minister have faith or not in the statement he made to the House about structures he wanted to implemented in the public service and about work standards to get more efficiency from it. If he had faith in this statement and in measures he announced to Parliament, I think it would be wise to wait for results from these new structures before setting up other organizations to investigate high officials to see if they really do their work honestly and efficiently.

In my opinion, we are then working on two plans. We do or we do not rely on the standards announced last week. In his statement of today, the minister says, and I quote:

... is the government's commitment to our parliamentary system of government and its resolve to protect the duties and prerogatives of parliament against bureaucratic encroachment.

We agree with that. We absolutely want that Parliament be the supreme authority and that it always be aware of any expense of public funds, that it know how the taxpayers' money is spent, but unfortunately it is not always possible to get all the reports on time, and thus we learn the facts once the damage is done and once the alternatives are proposed. We are said to be making non constructive criticisms, when any parliamentarian must assume some responsibilities and has the right to make positive propositions. It is not enough to criticize the government, a member of the House must also accomplish his duty which is to work conscientiously. It does not matter if, in doing so, he bothers the government, our duty is to say how we really consider the situation.

In his statement, the minister says the following:

As I stated in the conclusion of the progress report on financial administration which I tabled in the House of Commons last Friday: In our parliamentary system, the ultimate responsibility for financial control rests with parliament, and with parliament alone.

On this point, I agree with the minister, and I would like to take the means at our disposal, which are absolutely legitimate and legal according to the legislation, to fully assume our responsibilities.

In closing, the minister said something else that is very important and with which I agree. This is what he says:

The main reason—

—for establishment of the commission, I would say the main reason to give more power to the Auditor General and to follow his recommendations—

—is quite straightforward and is one which will be easily grasped by parliamentarians: the appointment of a Comptroller General as a sort of "umpire", to quote the Auditor General himself, calls into question not only fundamental aspects of government organization, but also some basic tenets of our parliamentary system of government.

This is a warning by the Auditor General. He is saying: Since I cannot do what the legislation empowers me to do, I suggest that you name someone else who could be called "Comptroller General". This is the conclusion reached by the Auditor General. He did not say: Establish a royal inquiry commission; he suggested the appointment of an official who