

in allocating financial resources to departments for their priority programs.

As it grew, it seemed to pay less effective attention to its Glassco inspired functions—to keep a firm watch not only on the purpose for which money is allocated, but the manner in which it is spent. The report in 1975 of the Auditor General, which landed like a bombshell in this parliament when it was tabled, was a direct result of this failure to follow those recommendations. Then, in came the Auditor General.

Everyone in this House will recall Mr. Macdonell. Everyone in this House waits and has waited for years with gleeful anticipation for the Auditor General's report, and I think that some of my friends on the other side said that after Maxwell Henderson, Mr. Macdonell would be some kind of an auditor pussycat.

Mr. MacFarlane: You said that, we didn't. We said he would be brilliant; he's a Scot.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): He put the case perfectly in the public accounts, and I want to quote it for edification of the chief government whip because I am sure it will do him the world of good. He said about the financial management of the government which the government whip supports so gleefully:

The present state of the financial management and control systems of departments and agencies of the Government of Canada is significantly below acceptable standards of quality and executives.

That was quite a judgment for the quiet Mr. Macdonell to make, and quite a judgment for an organization which at that time had supervision over the expenditure of \$34 million for the year ending March, 1976.

In dealing with Crown corporations and other adjuncts of the government, Mr. Macdonell said:

In the majority of the Crown corporations audited by the Auditor General, financial management and control is weak and ineffective. Moreover, co-ordination and guidance by control government agencies of financial management and control practices in the Crown corporations are virtually non-existent.

If the first was a strong comment on financial management procedures with respect to financial control and Crown corporations, this was an indictment of the management of the government. Mr. Macdonell chose his language with great care and great precision when he said in his report that the financial control system of the government was grossly inadequate.

It was against that background that when we asked for the appointment of a comptroller general by the Government of Canada they indicated that they felt it was not necessary, thereby flying in the face of the Auditor General. Then when the Auditor General's report sunk home in the minds of the Canadian people—and I suppose ministers of the Crown began getting the same mail from their constituents as members of parliament—they did not advance the argument about there being no need for a comptroller general. Instead, the government fell back on the argument that they had to investigate whether this would interfere with ministerial responsibility and the relationship of the ministry to parliament.

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That was the first time that I had ever heard any member of the government concern himself greatly about the issue of ministerial responsibility. It seems in the last little while they have not dealt with ministerial responsibility at all. In fact, in the mind of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) it has been something that should be avoided especially when it is embarrassing, and sometimes I am led to believe that they substitute the doctrine of ministerial ignorance for ministerial responsibility. Nonetheless, that is the argument that they advanced. It was not until the eleventh hour, when they were belaboured by the public and perhaps by their own conscience, that one day in this House of Commons there was the dramatic announcement: "We are going to have a comptroller general." Some would have called it a deathbed conversion. If it had been made today it would be a deathbed conversion. They went on to say: "A distinguished Canadian has been appointed Comptroller General of Canada, and he has his place in the scheme of things as established by Bill C-10".

As I said at the outset, it is very important that we clothe that official with sufficient statutory authority that he knows where he stands. We must give him some authority which can stand with ministerial whim so we do not see a repetition of the practice of government by order in council, government by regulation, government by guideline, all of which gives tremendous power to the executive and removes from parliament the power to set the guidelines that ought to be in an agency responsible for an aspect of government which is eventually reported to parliament.

This amendment has not been advanced to cripple the Comptroller General in any way. It is to give him solidity in the scheme of things, to lay out certain statutory responsibilities that we know he has, that he knows he has, that the government knows he has, that his brother deputy ministers in the public service know he has and that the public know he has, so that he, parliament and the rest of us can make judgments in the appropriate way. That is the purpose of the amendment and why I support the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) who before we adjourned said that we have to go much beyond that.

Treasury Board does a tremendous amount of evaluation and planning of government programs which should be referred to parliament. The objective of the amendment is to strengthen the office of the comptroller general and to put into the hands of the comptroller general the knowledge and the tools by which he can more effectively do his job, so that he and we know that there is the machinery available to look after the interests of the citizens of the country. That is the purpose of the amendment and I invite the House to support it.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): I welcome the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak on this bill. It is through the insistence of the members on this side that we have a large part to play in why the government has finally come around to creating a comptroller general position. Actually if the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) were doing their job, we would not need a comptroller general.