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AUDIT ACT WELL RECEIVED BY MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE

Important Government Bill is Practically Through the Committee Stage—Office of Auditor General Will be Abolished—Mr. Loudoun Will Become Comptroller General—The Bill Provoked Very Little Discussion.

The Legislature yesterday afternoon had under consideration the new Audit Act, and agreed to all the material features of the same. Members of the opposition had little or no adverse criticism to offer against the principle of the bill and some of its features were cordially approved by Hon. J. A. Murray. The bill abolishes the office of auditor general and repeals the much vaunted Hazen Audit Act of 1908. The Auditor General will in future be known as the Comptroller General. His duties have been enlarged and he will be responsible for the correctness of the accounts of the province. The present incumbent, Mr. W. A. Loudoun, who has given the province very efficient service under various governments, will become Comptroller General at a slightly increased salary. Following is the official report of the proceedings:

The House met at 3 o'clock. Bills to amend the Registry Act, to amend the Schools Act, to ratify an Order-in-Council granting aid to the Halifax sufferers, to amend the Act relating to Permanent Highways, and to amend the Act relating to Electoral Districts were read a third time and passed.

MR. MERSEREAU presented the first report of the committee on agriculture.

HON. MR. SPEAKER at this stage vacated the chair for half an hour, in order to allow the corporations committee to meet and consider some important bills.

MR. BURCHILL, on the House resuming, submitted reports of the standing rules and corporations committees.

MR. BURCHILL introduced a bill to authorize the Town of Chatham to issue debentures which, on the ground of urgency, was read a second time.

MR. SMITH (Albert) introduced a bill to amend an Act authorizing the municipality of Albert to effect temporary loans.

MR. CAMPBELL moved for suspension of rule 77 to permit of the introduction of a bill respecting the levying and assessing of taxes in the city of St. John. He explained that the bill had only recently been adopted by the common council and this was the first opportunity he had had of presenting it to the House. He also presented a petition praying for the passage of the said bill.

MR. LeBLANC moved that order referring bill No. 45 to the municipalities committee be discharged and that the bill be referred to the committee on corporations. He explained that the bill related to double tracking in the city of St. John and affected the New Brunswick Power Company. This Company had another bill before the corporations committee and it was deemed advisable to refer bill No. 45 to that committee.

HON. MR. FOSTER moved that bills relating to Fraser Companies, Limited, the Tracadie Boom Company and the Tabusintac Boom Company be placed on the order of the day for reference forthwith to the committee of the whole House.

Bills Agreed To.

The House then went into Committee and agreed to the bill relating to the Fraser Companies, Limited, with an amendment which has to do with expropriation proceedings on the Madawaska River. Before expropriating lands the Company will be required to deposit a bond with the Lieut. Governor-in-Council to cover such sums as may be awarded as damages to land owners.

The committee also agreed to the bills relating to the Tracadie and Tabusintac Boom Companies.

HON. MR. FOSTER moved that bills to grant an annuity to James Lynn and to provide for the auditing of the public accounts be referred forthwith to the Committee of the whole House.

The House again went into committee and agreed to the bill to provide an annuity to James Lynn. Mr. Lynn recently retired from the position of caretaker of the Departmental Building, Fredericton, after 25 years of service. The bill grants him an annuity of \$200.

The Audit Act.

The committee next took up consideration of the bill to provide for the auditing of public accounts.

HON. MR. FOSTER explained that the bill was a continuation of the Aud-

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it Act of 1908. He said that in bringing it down he did not wish to minimize the importance of the previous act. This act had been in force nearly ten years and those responsible for its administration felt that some improvements could be made to meet the changed conditions.

HON. MR. FOSTER said that same of the powers of the treasury board had been curtailed, as would be noticed by the following sections of the act. As a matter of convenience the clerk of the Executive Council was to be clerk of the treasury board.

MR. BAXTER, speaking to the section relating to the establishment of that the comptroller general would do what would be the difference between the duties of that official and those of the auditor general.

HON. MR. FOSTER replied that the duties of the Comptroller General had been greatly enlarged. Under the old act the auditor general had nothing to do other than auditing.

MR. BAXTER said that he took it that the comptroller general would have no control over the policy of expenditure. The old act, as far as he could see, went as far as this.

Comptroller General.

HON. MR. FOSTER said the new act would go farther in making the comptroller general responsible for the auditing of the whole accounting system of the province. Under the old act he had not been so responsible.

MR. BAXTER said that his side of the House held no brief for the gentleman now occupying the office of auditor general. The government under the Hon. Mr. Hazen had found him holding that office and had retained him. Perhaps the present administration believed there should be a change in the official. If such were the case, a statement to that effect should be made. If the idea was to appoint as comptroller general some one other than the present holder of the office of auditor general, then the two-thirds rule for removal of the auditor general would go by the board as soon as the new act was passed.

HON. MR. FOSTER replied that it was the intention of the government to continue the present incumbent of the office of auditor general in his place as long as he should attend properly to his duties. He would be the official responsible for the entire department. In the case of delay in the preparation of the auditor general's report, such as had occurred in the present session, he would be the man held responsible. It was the intention to appoint him. The two-thirds rule referred to by the hon. member from St. John County was excellent. He could say definitely there was no intention of making a new appointment.

MR. TILLEY asked concerning the salary of the comptroller general.

Salary Increased.

HON. MR. FOSTER replied that the blank in the bill would be filled at some time before enactment and might as well be done at once. His hon. friends opposite would remember that the salary of the auditor general at one time had been \$1,800 a year, and late had been increased to \$2,100. He proposed to make the salary \$2,400, and moved that that amount be inserted in the bill.

MR. BAXTER said the office was most important and really formed the centre of the entire administration of the province. There should be no criticism of the salary imposed, it might even be greater than the amount named by the hon. leader of the government. If it were increased, there would be no criticism from him. An official with so great responsibility should be made to feel that he was not living from hand to mouth.

MR. McGRATH asked if there was an audit of receipts as well as expenditures. The debts due the province should appear in the public accounts. A few days ago a minister had made the statement in the House that there was owing to his department the sum of \$250,000 from one concern. The debt did not appear in the report of the auditor general.

HON. MR. FOSTER said that what the hon. member from Northumberland referred to was not a debt, but a claim of the province not yet established, and it could not appear in the report. Under the system debts due the province would be shown. Under the old system it had not been considered part of the duties of the treasury department. The speaker called the attention of the House to the fact that the new act contained a clause giving the comptroller general the power of suspension over officers, clerks or other employees of his department.

MR. BAXTER said he concurred in giving this power to the comptroller general and would go farther and give him the power of dismissal. With the powers proposed he might suspend a clerk, who afterward might be reinstated by the executive council. He then would have under him an individ-

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ual who might consider himself to be in a position to defy him. The employees of the department should be in a position in which they must obey their chief or get out.

MR. TILLEY asked if the bill gave power to audit the books of companies subsidized by the province.

HON. MR. FOSTER replied that the intention of the act was to give the comptroller general power to have an audit made of the books of any steamship or other company subsidized by the province.

HON. MR. FOSTER said a change had been made. Under the existing system moneys were paid into the various departments and by them to the treasury department. The intention of the new act was to have all moneys go through the treasury department. Even if moneys were inadvertently paid in, they must be handed over to that department.

MR. BAXTER pointed out that the practice of paying moneys into the various departments, to which reference had been made, was in direct violation of the old audit act.

MR. BURCHILL said he understood that payments, even of accounts due the Crown Lands Department were to be made to the treasury department. Such had not been the practice

up to the present time and bills in that department were made out payable to the Minister of Lands and Mines or his deputy.

MR. BAXTER said that the practice was not in accordance with the old act.

MR. SMITH (Charlotte) said that it was absolutely necessary that all amounts should go to the one official, if a system of double entry were to be followed and the books were to balance.

The section relating to the payment of moneys to the credit of the provincial government was allowed to stand on the suggestion of Hon. Mr. Foster. HON. MR. FOSTER, speaking to the sub-section authorizing over-expenditure in the event of an appropriation becoming exhausted, said that the power for exceeding an appropriation should rest with the Lieut. Governor-in-Council. Every member of the government should bear the responsibility.

MR. MURRAY (Kings) said that under the old act that had really been the case. The treasury board had the power, but indirectly it was the Lieut. Governor-in-Council. The change in the new act was merely a more direct way of doing the same thing.

HON. MR. TWEEDDALE, speaking to section 25, which prohibits any official or employee of the government from giving promissory notes in pay-

(Continued on page 4.)