

made, and when the minister in charge of the department concerned comes into the house and says he does not know whether his subordinate has made charges or not, he is simply playing with the house. Either his subordinate made charges or he did not, and when the minister comes into the house he should be prepared to tell the house that his subordinate made these charges or that he did not. It is not good enough to say, "I do not know whether or not Mr. Thompson made these charges." Mr. Thompson is a subordinate in the minister's department, and the minister can ask Mr. Thompson to come before him and can say to him "Mr. Thompson, did you make these charges or did you not?" Then the minister would be prepared to tell us that Mr. Thompson did or did not make them. That is all it amounts to. It is not a question of rumour at all. It is a question of fact.

In order to bring the matter before the committee and in order that the house may have an opportunity to extend the reference to the committee, I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following words:

and that the committee be empowered to examine audited accounts up to the end of February, 1943.

I do not believe that there is any substance in the statement that the public accounts committee can examine only those accounts that have passed through the auditor general's hands. I believe the public accounts committee can demand and examine any account and find out whether that account is in order or not. There is no limit to what the members of this house can do in the way of investigating the public accounts. For that reason I have moved my amendment and I hope that the government will realize the necessity of accepting it.

Hon. ALPHONSE FOURNIER (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words because for the last year I have been chairman of the war expenditures committee. That committee was set up two years ago on the suggestion of the then leader of the opposition. I recall that he quoted in the house the reference made in the British house to their committee on national expenditures. That reference was adopted in this house with but a few changes in the wording. We tried from the outset to follow the procedure followed by the British committee on national expenditures. In the first year our war expenditures committee sat as a general committee for two months investigating the functions, set-up and procedure of the Department of Munitions and Supply. Later we subdivided into three sub-

committees. The main committee decided not to sit in public but left it to the subcommittees to decide how they would sit. I happened at the time to be chairman of subcommittee No. 3. We sat in camera. Other subcommittees, the one on which the hon. member for Danforth (Mr. Harris) was a member, sat in public, and if hon. members will look up the report of that committee they will find that it is a public document containing not only the committee's recommendations but also the evidence taken before that subcommittee. Everything that was said there was made public. Other subcommittees sat in camera where the evidence adduced was of such a nature that it could not be made public. We could not make a public inquiry, for instance, into the building of tanks, giving all the specifications, detailed costs, and even the contracts with the companies manufacturing the tanks. The members agreed at that time that we could not make that information public.

Mr. COLDWELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Are we discussing a motion and an amendment, or are we discussing the work of the war expenditures committee? I do not wish to shut off the Minister of Public Works. I agree that you cannot discuss in public such matters as the building of tanks and munitions on which details must be kept secret. But the point of order I am raising is that we are getting away from the motion and the amendment. I submit, sir, that the present discussion is entirely out of order, and I ask for your ruling.

Mr. SPEAKER: When the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker) was interrupted with regard to the relevancy of the remarks he was making, he was dealing at that moment with secret sessions of committees and was speaking to the motion for setting up the public accounts committee. As I understood his speech he was arguing that the committee should not sit in secret. I did not anticipate then that we were going to have a debate on what the war expenditures committee did last year, and I trust that members will confine themselves as far as possible to the motion and the amendment.

Mr. FOURNIER (Hull): I have no intention, Mr. Speaker, of discussing the war expenditures committee. There is a resolution on the order paper which will come up in due time and give hon. members an opportunity to discuss all the proceedings of that committee. I was drawn into this discussion by the remarks of the member for Lake Centre, who said that as the government members were in a majority on that committee the opposition were overridden; and he stated that