

accounts should be referred to the public accounts committee as soon as tabled and the public accounts committee set up. I think that should be done every year. It has not always been done; it has sometimes been done; when it has not been done, it is because the opposition no less than the government were content to have matters as they were.

In regard to the amendment which has just been proposed, may I say first of all that I think it is out of order. I think it is out of order for the reason that it is a substantive motion in itself and therefore cannot be moved as an amendment. His Honour the Speaker has already given a decision to that effect in this session.

But I do not wish to allow the matter to rest there. I am in complete accord with the leader of the opposition and with all hon. members of the house in their desire to see that every possible restraint is placed upon possible unnecessary expenditures and, certainly as far as it is humanly possible so to do, to prevent wasteful expenditure of any kind. The more we can apply safeguards in that direction, the better it is going to be for all concerned. At the same time I do think it is necessary that in these matters we should adopt a procedure which at least carries with it a sense of the responsibility of a great assembly such as this House of Commons with respect to matters that are to be made a subject of public inquiry. Newspaper articles have been read. They contain certain allegations and representations. Some of these allegations have already been discussed on the floor of this house as if they were charges. They have been spoken of as charges and the word goes out from the press gallery that the government has been charged with this and that, that there has been a charge that such and such has taken place, that there has been a charge also of such and such waste. When the matter is truly stated, it is seen to be only a report in a newspaper. Whether it is within quotation marks or not does not matter. If this House of Commons is going to begin to assume as evidence of bona fides everything that appears in the public press in the nature of representations or allegations against some officer of or matters connected with the government, and take that source as the one from which investigations are to be made, it must be apparent that we shall be making a farce of our whole procedure.

I have just as much respect for the gentlemen in the press gallery as my hon. friend has; but he has no guarantee that the particular report which he says is in quotations was from any journalist in the gallery. It may have been from some reporter who is

not in the gallery. I cannot say. At any rate, I hope my remarks will not be taken as reflecting at all on any journalist, one way or the other. What I say is this. The press has its responsibility, and the House of Commons and its members have their responsibility; and if there is to be an investigation of any matter I submit that at least before an inquiry starts before a committee of this parliament, some member of the House of Commons should himself take responsibility for asking that the matter in question be investigated. I think we should have something more to go upon before a public inquiry starts than simply an item in a newspaper.

It is free to any member of this house to ask that the public accounts committee be convened at any time it is desirable to have it so convened, and when the public accounts committee meets it is open to the members of that committee, which contains representatives from all sides of the house, to make what requests they wish with respect to the parties who are to appear. So far as I am concerned, and I am certain my colleagues would join me in this, if when the public accounts committee is called together hon. members wish Colonel Thompson to appear before it, we will not have the slightest objection to having Colonel Thompson so appear. If it is going to serve a helpful purpose to have the statements that have thus far appeared in the press made the subject of inquiry and Colonel Thompson called as a witness, the government will be only too ready to meet the wishes of the committee if that particular request is made. But I wish to make this perfectly clear, that in so doing it should not be assumed that we are establishing a precedent, so that any time anyone wishes to begin an investigation before the public accounts committee, a representation in the press may be taken as sufficient ground for the instituting of a public inquiry.

There is one other point. It is in reference to the public accounts. I understand that the auditor general goes through the public accounts and audits the public accounts before they are made public by tabling in the house. I cannot say how soon the accounts of the current year can be made available to parliament and tabled; that is a matter upon which I would have to get further information. I mention this because I believe the motion I have made goes as far as any similar motion has gone in any previous year,—as far as at this particular moment I feel it is possible to go.