

Appropriation Act No. 8

paper referring the matter to the public accounts committee, with advice to that committee to consult with the Auditor General and get his opinion, I think is the way in which it should be done.

I think the minister can, surely, do that.

• (5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Benson: I said I would look into this matter. I have not considered the proposition that a special motion should be placed on the order paper because no one suggested it until the hon. gentleman did just this minute. Certainly, I will consider it.

Mr. Churchill: We are making headway. I thought I suggested this the other day, but perhaps it escaped the minister's attention. My understanding is that committees can consider only those matters which are referred to them. If the minister will do that—

Mr. Benson: I will look into it.

Mr. Churchill: The minister has agreed to give serious consideration to having a motion of that type placed on the order paper. My hon. friend from Ontario, who is more precise in these matters, asks whether the minister would agree to do exactly that.

Mr. Benson: Oh.

Mr. Starr: That is a different story.

Mr. Benson: Now, the hon. gentleman is indicating that he wants me to tell the Auditor General what to do by means of a motion placed on the order paper. The Auditor General has to be consulted if he is to consider this question as one of priority. I have to look into these things before I even consider putting such a motion on the order paper.

Mr. Churchill: We try very hard here, sometimes without much success, but I will go over the ground again, briefly. I am asking the minister to have drafted the necessary motion referring to the public accounts committee the question of the financial transaction recently carried out by the hon. gentleman and involving about \$60 million used to pay salaries of government employees before interim supply had been passed through the house, and adding to that motion instructions to the committee to employ the good services of the Auditor General; and, further, that the committee should make its report to the House of Commons at the earliest possible moment. It is just a matter of drafting a motion. If the minister would like me to draft

[Mr. Churchill.]

it or would permit me to put such a motion on the order paper, I would do it.

Mr. Benson: The hon. gentleman can always put a motion down.

Mr. Churchill: Yes, I could put one at the bottom of the list and we would reach it in 1969. That is just nonsense. Let the minister consult with the leaders of the house or with the Minister of Finance, who so seldom appears to be here, and see whether this could not be done. If there is something unreasonable in my request, let him say so.

Mr. Benson: I did not say there was anything unreasonable in that request whatsoever. I assured the hon. gentleman I would look into the matter. I am not even sure that a motion is necessary in order that the public accounts committee might look into this matter. I am not sure that the public accounts committee could not proceed to investigate this without any motion being placed on the order paper. A motion might not be needed.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, is it not clear that committees can consider only such matters as are referred to them, and that so far all that has been referred to the public accounts committee are the public accounts and the Auditor General's report of a former year? The minister and I are carrying on an exchange in connection with another matter, namely the pensions of superannuated civil servants. I should like to have the subject discussed by the special joint committee on public service, but we have agreed that this cannot be done unless the terms of reference are broadened.

The motion which the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre is trying to draft could, I believe, be simplified a little. Committees, including the public accounts committee, already have authority to send for persons, papers and records. Therefore, I do not think it is necessary to give the committee authority to send for the Auditor General. But I believe it is necessary to give the committee authority to consider a matter which has not yet been referred to it.

The parliamentary secretary is shaking his head. All that has been referred to the public accounts committee so far are the public accounts and the Auditor General's report for a year that has gone by. The committee has nothing for the current fiscal year before it, and it is necessary to have a motion enlarging the terms of reference to include authority to consider those special transactions about