

Appropriation Act No. 8

more realistic our oil policy which the government stated not long ago.

I could keep talking, Mr. Chairman, until the government started to look for next month's supply of money and I still would not be satisfied. But I have an obligation, as have other members from northern Ontario, to try and find out exactly what the application made by Trans-Canada means to the economy of all parts of Canada. If it is possible to derive some benefit for northern Ontario, then this is part of my responsibility, but I find this extremely difficult with this government. I cannot really find anybody in the government, including the Prime Minister, who can speak for the interests of the people around me.

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Schedules A to F inclusive agreed to.

On clause 1—*short title*.

The Chairman: Shall clause 1 carry?

Mr. Churchill: Before clause 1 carries, Mr. Chairman, I do not want to delay the committee but would the minister make a kindly reply to the suggestions which have been made by the hon. member for Peace River and myself concerning reference to the appropriate committee and the Auditor General?

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, not only have I made all the documents available to the Auditor General, including the legal opinion which I tabled in the house yesterday, but in addition to this I have undertaken to table a list of every account indicating the amount of funds which are in the accounts, the amount used for the payroll and the amount supplemented from vote 15. I anticipate that I will table this tomorrow.

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Chairman, this illustrates the grave difficulty we face in this house. The minister has now said that he is making available all the information. No one is suggesting he is hiding information from us, but as I pointed out the other day the Auditor General normally will not report to parliament on the present financial transactions for over a year. This is the normal procedure. He starts at the beginning of the next fiscal year to review the expenditures of the last fiscal year, and his report would be completed and perhaps ready at the end of December 1967. If the house were not sitting it would not come before us until 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting. So, it could well be not until the spring of 1968 that we would find out the opinion of the Auditor General about

whether what happened was in accordance with the laws of the land and should be followed or whether it should be changed.

This is what we are asking of the minister. In view of the delay in the report of the Auditor General,—which is according to custom; I am finding no fault there—we are asking that an early reference to the Auditor General be made through the means of the committee on public accounts and that a report be returned to this house at the earliest opportunity.

The only reply I get from the minister is that he has disclosed everything. I am not saying that he is holding anything back, but we do not have the opinion of the one man who has the staff and the competence to give us that opinion.

Under arrangements which have been made within the last year or two the Auditor General has independent legal advice to assist him. He also has an enlarged staff. In order to put aside the duties with which he is presently engaged he would require, I would think, a reference from this house to the committee on public accounts and then an instruction to that committee to consult with and get from the Auditor General an opinion concerning the recent transactions.

Why does the government refuse what I am sure everybody will consider a reasonable request? No accusations are being made here at all.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, I have not refused anything. What is the hon. member putting forward? Does he want me to tell the public accounts committee to refer this matter to the Auditor General? Does he want me to tell the public accounts committee how to run its affairs? This is a committee composed of members of parliament who are quite capable of running their own affairs and of deciding whether or not they want to ask that this matter be referred immediately to the Auditor General for report.

Mr. Churchill: The minister is now getting a little excited—

Mr. Benson: Not at all.

Mr. Churchill:—and I was attempting to be very objective about this. I am not asking the minister to give instructions to any committee whatever. I am asking the minister to take the appropriate steps to refer this matter to the committee. A government motion on the order