

Committee might perhaps share our view that in no case should a debt due to the Crown be recommended to the Treasury Board and to the Governor in Council for deletion unless the person is aware of the debt and every effort is made to collect it. The Committee might care, it seems to me in this case, to note its concern that an account could so easily be written off under the circumstances that are described here.

Mr. BALDWIN: Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question on that? There are circumstances in this case, of course, where it might be obvious that the government would not like to proceed, but would Mr. Henderson feel that something could be done in the line of a certificate to be attached by the appropriate official of the government to the effect—or is this already required—that there has been an effort made to collect and that the official certifies under all the circumstances involved a decision has been made not to proceed for certain reasons? In other words the onus should lie upon the government, before it abandons any debt of any kind, to attach a certificate, and under that certificate the government then takes the responsibility for its forgiveness of the debt. Now is this required under Section 23 of the Financial Administration Act at the present time?

Mr. HENDERSON: No, I do not think it is actually required, Mr. Baldwin, but I could not agree with you more, that if such a statement were put into the files and were seen by us that it would remove any doubt in our minds that adequate steps have not been taken to look into the matter before action was taken to write it off. It seems to me it is an elemental principle of internal financial control.

Mr. BIGG: Sometimes the cost of straightening this thing out in a cumbersome legal manner might be a great deal more of a burden on the Crown than the small debt involved. I think in terms, say, of an old age pension where there is a typographical error in the cheque the old person thinks that if they got it in time they may get \$10 more on their cheque. Now they can barely live on this \$75—this money is spent maybe at Christmas time and then you write to them and ask them to refund this, which means that some time during the year they have to try to live on \$65 a month. I think that here there should be some ministerial discretion and as long as the thing is covered by a proper declaration by the department or something to show that it is not arbitrary—

Mr. HENDERSON: Well I agree with you completely, Mr. Bigg. If something like that had been placed in the file with a memorandum from the person in charge indicating that they are fully aware of the circumstances, but in view of these circumstances they had decided not to press it and accordingly to proceed, that would have met our point.

● (11:50 a.m.)

Mr. WINCH: I would like to know from Mr. Henderson why it disturbs him in any way whatsoever in view of the fact that: "The resulting debt was deleted from the accounts by Executive order made pursuant to Section 23(1) of the Financial Administration Act." As the action was taken pursuant to regular authority to be followed through by executive order what is the particular reason for writing down this case as it was done pursuant to authority?