

Mr. GORDON GRAYDON (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, before this amendment is put I should like to say a word or so in connection with the argument which has been made by the hon. member for Weyburn (Mr. Douglas). On Friday last, on the orders of the day, I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) if he would permit the auditor general's report to be brought before the public accounts committee. I had it in mind that that should be an automatic procedure, one which I think should have been adopted in previous years as well.

There are many reasons which would move one to make that suggestion. Far too little attention is given by the House of Commons to the auditor general's report. On that occasion I was careful in my phraseology in order to indicate that the whole house must share some responsibility with respect to it, since perhaps the excuse may be made that from time to time a motion might have brought the auditor general's report before that committee. It will produce a much more healthy condition with respect to our whole scheme of expenditures to have these expenditures come before the public accounts committee year by year. It will not only provide an opportunity for that committee to deal with the various items in question, but it will also have the effect of putting a brake upon some of the spending if the departments know that each year the public accounts committee will give close scrutiny to the auditor general's report.

I spoke mainly with the idea of providing the first step toward having a closer scrutiny of accounts generally by this parliament. Coupled with that suggestion to the Prime Minister was the suggestion that Colonel Thompson, who had made certain charges as reported in one of the Ottawa newspapers, which charges were enlarged upon by the hon. member for Weyburn and also, on Friday last, by the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker), should be brought before the public accounts committee. My suggestion was that Colonel Thompson should be summoned as a witness before that committee. I was saying then what the hon. member for Weyburn has said to-day in different words. I should like to associate myself with the suggestion he has made and to say that we in this parliament, particularly the members of the opposition, have a duty to see to it that no avenue is closed to the house or to parliament by which a full disclosure and complete scrutiny of the money being spent in Canada during this war-time period can be made by this House of Commons. There are in this dominion large sections of our people who are paying taxes in amounts which they have

never been called upon to pay before. Because of that and for reasons of war there is growing consciousness among the people generally, amounting to a great pressure of public opinion, that every means should be adopted by members of the house to see to it that every dollar and every cent of that money shall be spent to the best possible advantage and in the most effective way towards the winning of this war. That is a duty which the public expect of the government and it is a duty which the government owes to the public.

I am glad to associate myself and this party with the amendment which has just been made, and I think we should go to the full extent and avail ourselves of every possible avenue through which these accounts can be closely scrutinized. We should not be in any way restricted or limited with respect to the time element in our inquiry into these accounts. Wherever there are matters which should be scrutinized or accounts which should be audited let us not be guided simply by a matter of dates; let us go back to the time when these accounts were incurred and the expenditures made, and then where necessary let us turn the accounts over to the public accounts committee so that it may scrutinize them in detail.

I would therefore ask the government if they would on this occasion enlarge the scope of the scrutiny of these expenditures to include any and every expenditure made up to the present time, so that the public will know that no stone has been left unturned by parliament in attempting to ascertain whether or not every cent that has been spent has been properly and well spent by the government and by parliament.

Hon. L. R. LaFLECHE (Minister of National War Services): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat at a loss to understand upon what authority it is taken for granted that the director of economies control actually made these statements to the press. I am not in a position either to affirm or to deny that he did. As I said last week in this house, I instituted inquiries as soon as the matter was brought to my attention late that afternoon.

I submit to the hon. gentleman who has just spoken (Mr. Graydon) that it may not be wise to give a wrong direction to this matter by speaking of charges or accusations at least until we know who has said anything and what he has said. The only thing I am yet able to bring to the attention of the house in connection with this matter is a memorandum dated Saturday last, March 6,