

*Government Orders*

It is my view that officials of the secretariat should, in general, testify as witnesses before the committee in two circumstances.

The rules of this House point out very clearly the powers of committees, and a minister of the Crown should not be telling a parliamentary committee, and particularly the public accounts committee, that on two specific occasions would his officials appear.

The first he said is, and I quote:

—when the Auditor General has specifically directed recommendations or observations to the Treasury Board.

The second is:

—when, in certain instances, it is useful for the committee to have officials of the secretariat available to respond to general questions on specific Treasury Board policies. Beyond these two instances, however, I feel that it is generally inappropriate for secretariat officials to testify as witnesses on matters that relate primarily to the operations of other departments.

The problem here is that Treasury Board is supposed to be the controller of the purse, and lays down guidelines for government departments and their expenditures.

We have taken it, and it has been a tradition, that officials from Treasury Board can appear when the Auditor General is there or appear when people are there from other departments.

Going on with the minister's letter, he says:

The accountability of other departments to the Public Accounts committee would not, in my view, ordinarily be served by such participation. These criteria govern the arrangements that were explicitly made with members of your staff regarding participation of the secretariat at the committee meeting of November 28, 1990 which was addressing the project to modernize the CCGS *Louis Saint-Laurent*, the icebreaker.

There are differences of opinion on that discussion as well. He goes on:

Pursuant to discussions with senior officials of the secretariat, your staff agreed that my officials would only observe at the meeting.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that that was not my understanding at all.

It was also agreed that any issues raised by the committee touching on the role of Treasury Board would be promptly followed up on thereafter.

With regard to "thereafter", the purpose of holding committee meetings, particularly those on accountability, of an accountability role, is to have these people there to answer questions, and put those answers on the

records of the committee meeting at the time. A person who was there did not come up to the table at the time when we asked for a person from Treasury Board. Another person did, but apparently nobody was really designated to do it.

The minister went on to say:

With respect to the meeting of your committee on December 18, 1990 on the subject of the *Louis Saint-Laurent* icebreaker, please be advised that either Mr. David McEachran, deputy secretary of the Administrative Policy Branch, or Mr. Richard Paton, Assistant Secretary in the same branch, will be attending in order to respond to questions of the committee on Treasury Board's policies touching on the management of projects.

They came to that meeting. There is no sense in senior officials advising ministers that they do not have a role to play at committee meetings in the House of Commons. I totally disagree with the suggestion that Treasury Board should not be present at meetings when they are asked to be there in relation to other departments. I want to make that very clear.

It is spelled out clearly in *Beauchesne* that a parliamentary committee can send for persons, papers, et cetera, and can invite people to appear before the committee. If those people do not want to attend, the committee can order them to attend. You are well aware of that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to send a message to senior people in Treasury Board that they, too, are accountable to the Parliament of Canada.

I hope that Parliament will come to grips with picking a chairman for the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations so that that issue can be heard and decided upon.

• (1620)

I want to touch briefly on Public Service 2000, which is a very important part of government policy in the management of its employees. Our public accounts committee recommended that a special committee be set up to hear the Public Service 2000 issues. We felt that this would have to be an in-depth study. We certainly did not have time to do it, even though it was in the Auditor General's report. We had about six meetings on it and we submitted our report to the House. The President of the Treasury Board said that he would like to have a special committee study Public Service 2000. He also went on to say that he was going to consult with other people in the Public Service and with unions.