

Canadian National Railways

consistently had a tremendous problem in maintaining enough staff to carry out the work he has to undertake. I believe that in the public accounts committee over the past several years we have been trying to find ways in which the Auditor General can more easily obtain staff. This has now been solved to some degree, I believe. Nevertheless I think it would be utterly out of the question for the Auditor General to attempt to undertake an audit of the magnitude of that of the C.N.R. in the forthcoming year, in any circumstances. I will bring the suggestion of the hon. member to the attention of the government.

[Translation]

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words in order to take up the remarks of the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Gregoire) concerning western Canada.

I merely want to remind him that in the west, besides wheat, there are French Canadian groups that have many problems and often suffer because of the irresponsible words of the hon. member for Lapointe and other members of his group.

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Gregoire: I rise on a point of order. After what the minister has just said—

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Chairman, there is no point of order.

Mr. Gregoire: I rise on a question of privilege.

The Chairman: Is the hon. member for Lapointe rising on a question of privilege?

Mr. Gregoire: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lambert: The hon. member had better make sure there actually is a question of privilege.

Mr. Gregoire: Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Teillet) has described our remarks as irresponsible. I wonder whether his French Canadian colleagues do not really find his own remarks of tonight irresponsible, because the demands we make are as much for his fellow citizens as for our own—

The Chairman: Order. The question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Lapointe is not justified.

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Chairman, I fully agree with your ruling. There was no question of privilege and I am surprised that attempts are being made to keep us from speaking by raising so-called questions of privilege.

[Text]

On another point I would ask the parliamentary secretary if it is not a case of there being more friends in one firm than in the

[Mr. Benson.]

other, because both of them are national firms and have representatives in the major cities where the Canadian National operates. Since he cannot show that there is a greater degree of competence in the one firm than in the other, why does he not face up to the situation and say that the government prefers the one firm to the other?

Mr. Benson: I think it is fairly obvious, and I made the point in my earlier statement that the C.N.R. audit is reverting to the status it had originally in that it is being given to the firm that has carried it on almost continuously since the C.N.R. has had independent auditors, except for the period when Mr. de Lalanne was appointed. I did not mention it earlier and I will try not to mention Mr. de Lalanne's position when he was appointed auditor in 1958. The audit is now simply reverting to the firm that has carried out the C.N.R. audit continuously except for a period when Clarkson, Gordon and Company did it in the 'thirties. Would one say that that firm was friendly to the party that is now in opposition? I really do not know, but the Clarkson firm was appointed by the Bennett government in the 'thirties. Mr. de Lalanne was appointed in 1957 or 1958 and it was then turned over to his firm of McDonald, Currie and Company. It is now simply going back now to the firm that has done the C.N.R. audit almost continuously.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask the parliamentary secretary what amount of fees is involved in an appointment of this kind. How much would this firm of accountants receive in fees?

Mr. Benson: It is \$100,000 or \$125,000 for the total audit. I believe it is \$100,000, but I am subject to correction.

Mr. Knowles: Could the Auditor General not engage a few people for that amount of money?

Mr. Benson: About 15 chartered accountants.

Mr. Scott: I have been listening to the parliamentary secretary closely and I did not hear the reasons he gave for dissatisfaction with the present firm.

Mr. Benson: There is no dissatisfaction with the present firm. I would say that the firms are equally good. I do not want to dwell upon the appointment of Mr. de Lalanne in 1958. I did not want to point out that he was a candidate for a particular political party prior to his appointment. The audit is simply reverting to the firm that has traditionally done it.