

Refitting of HMCS "Bonaventure"

A list of a number of categories and items follows, and shows their disposal by the government. We find that a total of 55 recommendations were set forth by the committee. Ten of these were referred back to the Auditor General, and two were withdrawn by the Public Accounts Committee itself. This left 43 recommendations which had been made to the government, and I think we could consider them as the actual recommendations of the committee. Out of this total no action, to the date of the report, had been taken on 14 of the recommendations. The executive had indicated disagreement with another 14 of the recommendations. Progress had been made on six of them; five of them had been implemented; two of them had been partially implemented; one was soon to be implemented, and in another case the action taken was not satisfactory to the committee. If the Public Accounts Committee is going to do an efficient and effective job, its work must be recognized by the government to a greater degree than is indicated in this report. I want to point out that the members of the Public Accounts Committee come from all parties in this House and every member, without exception, is interested in seeing that Canadians get full value for every dollar spent.

● (4:40 p.m.)

I should like to go back to one of the items mentioned in today's motion, Mr. Speaker, and that is the *Bonaventure*. This is a good example of the weakness and inefficiency of one or more government departments. I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee which examined the expenditure on the *Bonaventure* refit, originally brought to our attention by the Auditor General. I was astounded at how ineffective and inefficient were the terms of a number of contracts. Slipshod and haphazard methods had been used in the drafting of contracts and I believe this eventually resulted in excessive spending of the taxpayers' money. I do not wish to point to any individual in government but I feel that this example should be a lesson to members in this House, and to the government in particular, that the departments concerned should carefully check procedures when letting out contracts. If we are to get better value for the money we spend some tightening up will have to be done. I never thought when first dealing with the refit of the *Bonaventure* as we discussed it in committee, that it would lead to the revealing and shocking departmental procedures used in the spending of the taxpayers' dollar.

If I may, I shall pick out one or two examples to illustrate how slipshod methods used in letting out contracts led to public money being wasted. One of the best examples is the small contract dealing with the briefing room chairs. This matter has been raised in the House before, but in raising it again I want to point out that, while the amount of money involved is small, the disturbing thing is that such a slipshod and haphazard method could have been used in any department of government. I believe this aspect of the matter disturbs every member of the House.

The committee found it very difficult to establish the real cost of moving the briefing room chairs. After a great deal of work, and after hearing testimony which proved to be incorrect, the committee found that the Davie Shipbuilding Company, which had the initial contract, had moved the chairs out in May of 1966 because, it was stated, they required the area for the purpose of conducting electronic tests. Later we found that two separate contracts for the same chairs were let out by the Department of Defence Production. This information angered every member of the committee. It makes one wonder what type of accounting system the department has,—

An hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Harding:—when two contracts are let out for the same job, each in a different amount. I will not go into the numbers of the contracts. The subcommittee was told that the cost of moving the chairs off the *Bonaventure* was high because there had been a great deal of difficulty in unlatching them from the briefing room floor. It was said that it had been necessary for workmen to crawl between the floor and a false ceiling to enable them to get at the nuts and bolts which attached the chairs to the floor so that they would not slide around in heavy weather. This explanation sounded logical and the committee accepted it, until we went to Nova Scotia to check the *Bonaventure* ourselves. Then, we found that it was not necessary to crawl anywhere to unlatch the chairs, all that had to be done was to tilt them forward and lift them up.

As I said previously, members of the committee were angered to find that someone had attempted to fool them over what the committee thought was an excessive cost for removing these chairs from the ship. One thing led to another, and then we found that there were two contracts; the job had been paid for twice. One of the committee recommendations was that the \$4,173 paid under