

Appropriation Act No. 8

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, I rise merely to give the hon. member the assurances for which he has asked and to once again assure him that no funds were used for purposes other than those for which they were voted. The only transfers were from financial vote 15. I had already tabled in the House of Commons, and they have been printed in *Hansard*, the transfers that were made and the legal opinion on which such transfers were made. I would also assure the hon. member that any funds which are accumulated in accounts at the end of the year are returned to the consolidated revenue fund. They are not spent, and are therefore not disposed of. It is not a matter of looking for cash; it is a matter of obtaining authority to spend. Authority to spend is granted for a month or months. It is not granted in the way of an appropriation that is needed in respect of each account for each month, but the allocation is one twelfth or more of the year's appropriation. During the year moneys accumulate because the one twelfth that is provided may not be spent; and there is a balance authorized for expenditure in that account. When you approve an interim supply bill, you do not approve moneys to be spent only in respect of that account. You approve one twelfth, two twelfths, or three twelfths of the total amount required for the year, which then becomes available to the government to spend.

Mr. Alkenbrack: Mr. Chairman, the minister has attempted to answer some of the questions that I have put on the record. I submit to you, sir, that Bill No. C-245 provides, especially in clause 3, a complete contradiction of the statements made by the minister. They did not have the authority to spend money voted other than for specific purposes, under the authority of clause 3, for example. Is this not the standard bill that is put before the house every year?

Mr. Benson: Of course it is.

Mr. Alkenbrack: Is there a clause in every appropriation bill similar to clause 3? I submit, Mr. Chairman, that there certainly is; there must be. Clause 3 lays down a definite purpose, authorization limitation and end use of the funds that we are debating today. Will whatever government happens to be in power next year go around trying to pick up a great many loose ends, and spend money for some unauthorized purpose? I would hope not, Mr. Chairman.

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

Mr. Benson: This was not done.

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Chairman, I wish to say just a few words on this subject. The minister has once again given us the assurance that everything was done properly and was in order. We are not questioning his word at all. But if the minister is so certain that in this regard everything was absolutely above board, why will he not take the steps necessary to have this entire financial transaction studied by the standing committee on public accounts, with the Auditor General in attendance, and then report back to the house? Then, we would know whether this is the type of procedure that should be followed or whether a change should be made.

The Auditor General is the person who could give that advice. The Auditor General is responsible to parliament as a whole. He is an independent person, not just a government employee, and parliament as a whole is the body to which the Auditor General should make his report.

Yesterday, the hon. member for Peace River, who chaired the standing committee on public accounts for two or three years and can speak with authority concerning its activities, indicated how things have changed over the last several years with regard to some of the accounts as they are set out in the blue book. He raised some grave doubts about the transactions that were carried out recently. The minister should respond to the reasonable request that has been put forward from this side of the house. He should take account of the doubts raised by the hon. member for Peace River, who has had the experience that I mentioned, and should want to make sure that the assurance given to us in the house is reinforced at the earliest opportunity by a study carried out by committee and a report from the Auditor General.

We are not questioning the word of the minister in this respect; but if there is nothing to hide, if this is a proper procedure, let us have the Auditor General's report to parliament on it. The minister must admit that this is a most unusual procedure. I know of no instance when this has happened before. We are quite prepared to admit that there can be the transfer of funds from the contingency fund, in view of the wording in the estimates right now, and perhaps that wording should be altered. However, as the hon. member for Peace River pointed out yesterday, once the government starts using the contingency fund for purposes that originally were not intended, it is open to the government to pour