

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

March 31, 1949.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts met this day at 11.00 a.m. The Chairman, Mr. L. P. Picard, presided.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, we have a quorum.

I wish to report first on the work of the committee on agenda.

The subcommittee on agenda and procedure met on Tuesday, March 29th, and has agreed to recommend:

1. That the next meeting of the committee be held at 11.00 o'clock a.m., on Thursday, March 31st, and that the Auditor General, Mr. Watson Sellar, be requested to prepare and present at that meeting a statement in respect of certain matters which he considers important. It is also recommended that the business of the meeting be confined to the presentation of this statement and questioning of Mr. Sellar on it.

2. That the next meeting of the subcommittee to consider agenda be held as soon as practicable after Mr. Sellar has been heard.

3. That each member of the committee be furnished with a copy of any brief or statement prepared for the committee's information.

Now, we discussed at the same meeting of the committee on agenda the question of Mr. Nicholson's motion:

That this committee proceed with an examination of the procedure of auditing the accounts of the Canadian National Railways with accountants other than the Auditor General.

We came to the conclusion that this should be ruled out of order on the ground that it deals with a matter which is beyond the scope of the committee's order of reference. It is suggested that such a motion might properly be made in the Sessional Committee on Railways and Shipping, owned and operated by the government.

I met Mr. Nicholson personally and suggested that as he was a member of the other committee that he might bring the matter to their attention. This he declined to do considering that this committee was the place where it should be brought up. I have reserved final decision on the matter and will consult further with the authorities in the persons of the law officers of the Crown, and the Clerk of the House if necessary. But at the present time I might say this with reference to his motion, that it appears to be outside our jurisdiction for two reasons particularly; first of all, there is the Committee on Railways and Shipping owned and operated by the government sitting at the moment and while that committee is sitting, members of the House are not allowed to raise any matter pertaining to that committee as long as it is sitting, or until in fact its report has been brought down in the House. We as a committee are a creature of the House and we are in the same position as members when it comes to dealing with a matter of this kind.

Mr. PROBE: Might I digress there for a minute; is that true only so long as that committee is discussing the matter in question?

The CHAIRMAN: So long as it continues in operation. On that point I would refer you to Beauchesne, volume 2, paragraph 602 on page 181 where it says: