

Interim Supply

members then classified as austerity programs. Legal opinions were given and the Liberals said at that time that because those opinions were not filed we were hiding the facts. The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Minister of Transport and the Prime Minister complained at that time. They debated the question at some length. The Minister of National Revenue now says he does not have any precedent. Let me suggest that he has the precedent espoused by those great leaders of his party. He now says, when asked to file a legal opinion, that he will give this request consideration. Tonight the minister says he has to consider and weigh this matter. Do you know why he has to consider and weigh it? It is because he wants to hide the facts from parliament and the people of Canada.

• (8.20 p.m.)

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I might interrupt the hon. member to answer his question. I am sure it is a question he has asked.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Benson: I have not given an answer whether we will file the legal opinion. If I wanted to do so, I could refer to what the hon. member and other members on that side of the house have said with reference to filing legal opinions given by law officers of the crown and submitted to ministers of the crown. I have not refused to file the legal opinion. I am not hiding behind anything.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Chairman, I must congratulate the minister on giving us the glibest answer possible. He says that our position was the same. We are talking tonight in 1966. We agree that we have shifted positions, but the minister is a member of the government and his government is in charge of the affairs of this country. I ask the minister tonight, through you, Mr. Chairman, to have an investigation carried out by a special committee of the House of Commons and the Senate to determine whether the Minister of National Revenue and the government acted with propriety, legally and without fraud and misrepresentation in making the payments in question.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, I have been asked another question. I would simply like to answer the question raised by the hon. member by saying that all the documents involved have already been referred to the watchdog of parliament, the Auditor General, and we are

[Mr. Woolliams.]

quite pleased to have him look at the documents and the actions taken by the government. As a matter of fact, this afternoon I tried to have tabled, but instead they were appended to *Hansard*, the particular Treasury Board minutes involved so that my hon. friend could read them tonight at his leisure and decide whether they were proper.

Mr. Woolliams: I do not mind how many interruptions there are in my speech, Mr. Chairman. I know I am getting at the sensitivity of the government and am hitting at facts that are correct because I have had ten interruptions in ten minutes.

Mr. Benson: On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman, I have not once interrupted the hon. member. He has asked me questions and I have replied. I asked him whether he wanted answers to his questions and he said yes. I have answered the questions he has asked.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Let us have a ruling on the question of privilege, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Woolliams: There is no question of privilege, Mr. Chairman. I am asking questions because I am searching for information. The government has refused the facts to the defence committee. If the minister is so sure he is correct and has talked to the Auditor General personally about this matter, which he later denied and left the impression that the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre were wrong, perhaps we should have an investigation and have the Auditor General brought before the committee to tell us what conversation did take place between himself and the minister or the department.

Mr. Benson: On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman, I did not say I had talked to the Auditor General. As a matter of fact, the only time I have talked to the Auditor General since this matter arose was tonight, when I phoned the Auditor General to find out whether I was correct in referring to his organization as a department. The first time was this evening.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Chairman, this is another frivolous question of privilege. The minister has now, in a great state of remorse, finally telephoned the Auditor General to find out whether he was correct. This is in direct contradiction of the facts as set out this afternoon, and the minister knows it. I say to the minister in all sincerity—