

Appropriation Act No. 8

as far as hon. members could reasonably ask the minister to go at this time.

Mr. Churchill: I am not going to press the matter any further except to say that if there is nothing to hide and nothing to conceal, I cannot understand why the government will not refer this matter to the committee on public accounts. If it is not going to do so we will be asking, what are you hiding? What are you concealing? What are you afraid of? The Auditor General is the only person who can assure us that everything was all right.

I am expecting that everything is all right, but I am concerned for the future, and the method by which we shall deal with these things. Yesterday, the hon. member for Peace River pointed out that if this is taken to be a precedent for the future the contingency vote in the finance estimates could be enlarged to \$100 million, \$150 million or \$300 million, and there would be no check on it whatever, except a year and a half later, with respect to how the government was using that money.

The practice in the past was to vote money for a specific purpose. Now, we have drifted into error with the contingency fund. As the hon. member for Peace River pointed out yesterday, a few years ago that fund totalled just 1 million or a little more. It rose to \$29 million a year ago. It stands at \$15 million now, and supplementary estimates could raise it to \$30 million or \$50 million.

Mr. Knowles: Doesn't the hon. member know it has already been raised to \$60 million by Supplementary Estimates A?

Mr. Churchill: There we are. Where is the limit? Surely, the Auditor General should tell parliament whether this is a practice that should be followed in the future or whether it should cease immediately. I also suggest that when the estimates book is published for 1967-68 the small print under that contingency vote should be altered, and possibly made to read the way it used to read some years ago. This is all we are seeking. Surely, parliament as a whole has a right to ask for this.

The government does not control everything in this country, but if it pursues this present method as a precedent for the future, we will have lost all control over the way in which money is used after we pass the estimates. Anyone who considers the financial situation in this country, and has time to look at this matter, would accept the point of view I am putting forward.

[Mr. Wahn.]

The government house leader, who is familiar with motions to refer subjects to committees, is present. Can he not persuade the Minister of National Revenue to accede to our reasonable request to put a motion on the order paper, which we will not debate, referring the recent financial transactions to the committee on public accounts for investigation? As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has pointed out, that committee has the right to call witnesses and would likely call the Auditor General.

Mr. McIlraith: Why would you refer something to that committee which it is its duty to deal with in due course when it comes to it through the proper channels? Under legislation, it is the duty of the Auditor General to check on these transactions, which I am sure he will.

When he does that and he makes any report which warrants the public accounts committee dealing with it, then the committee will deal with it. But if there is nothing in his report which warrants that, then the committee will not deal with it. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre is putting a most hypothetical proposition forward, one that is really not based on any logic that I can discover.

Mr. Churchill: You should not have ended your comment with that remark, because I would have to protest that I am very logical in my reasoning. However, I will not enter a debate on that subject. The minister has said that all this will reach the Auditor General in due course. I have already said that three or four times, but in due course means sometime in 1967, and that report will not reach the house until spring 1968.

I am saying that this is a different procedure, a new procedure, an unexpected procedure that we should investigate and have a report on during 1966. Then if the Auditor General says this is a wrong procedure to follow, we should modify it for the next financial year.

Mr. McIlraith: Does the hon. member not realize that the Auditor General's duties are set out by statute, and his duty to report is clearly set out in that act? If the hon. member wants to modify that statute, then there is a certain procedure to be followed and that is to introduce an amendment to the legislation covering the Auditor General. Surely, that is the only logical way to deal with it.

Mr. Starr: But this is a special case.