

Auditor General Act

I am simply trying to extend in some detail the means by which the House, having received a report from the Auditor General, then proceeds to deal with it. Second, this is not without precedent. Similar measures have been adopted with respect to other legislation. I suggest to Your Honour that while it may be appalling to members of the House because it is an innovation, if there is a reservation in Your Honour's mind as to the bona fide nature and regularity of this proposal, I think Your Honour should take this well known principle into account and give the benefit of the doubt to the regularity of the motion so that it can be debated.

I am not saying that at this time in order to persuade the government to accept it. The only alternative is that at third reading I would, of course, be free to make a motion to refer the bill back to committee for consideration, without specifying anything. The committee could deal with an issue of this kind. The difference is that I could have 40 minutes instead of 20 at that time, which is, of course, to my advantage. I do not know whether it would be to the advantage of the House, but I can advise the House that it can look forward to a 40-minute speech from me at third reading rather than a 20-minute speech at this time.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I hope what the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and I have to say meets the point of potential difficulty Your Honour might have. To my mind, the question is whether this amendment introduces a new principle to the bill. The plain and simple answer to that is that the amendment is merely a continuation of a point on which the bill is totally deficient. After all, clauses 6, 7 and 8 would refer reports to the House of Commons. Clause 7 says that the Auditor General shall report annually to the House of Commons, but it says nothing about what the House of Commons shall do.

These are reports to the House of Commons, not to the government, yet it is a well known fact that under the rules there has to be a motion from the cabinet to refer an item to any committee of this House, with the exception of the estimates. Therefore, the fact that the Auditor General is responsible to the House of Commons with regard to his annual reports can be totally and utterly blocked by the government by its refusal to call that order of business or by its refusal even to put it down. Therefore, it seems to me that the motion of the hon. member for Peace River is the most natural thing to include in the bill in order to dispose of these reports.

Our rules are totally sound. The Chair would be the first to admit that despite the almost weekly requests that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization consider this or that aspect of difficulties in the rules, it is still the government House leader and the government who refuse to put forward motions to refer to appropriate committees. All the committees have been boning-up until now, save and except the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. It had its organizational meeting, but since that time it has done nothing. I think that has been an act of total contempt of this House by the government House leader.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

Considering the representations which have come from the Chair and from various members, it seems all agree that changes have to be made. However, nothing is done about it. To that extent, proposed motion No. 3 is quite in order and does not introduce a new principle in the bill, because all it sets out is what the House of Commons shall do with the report. In order to handle the report, there has to be a committee. The House is not going to consider the report of the Auditor General in committee of the whole, because with the exception of budgetary measures the House does not sit in committee of the whole unless there is specific agreement to do so. I find it just a little difficult to understand why there might be any objection to motion No. 3 on the ground that it might raise another point.

Second, in most ways motion No. 3 embodies what is already a matter of practice, but it puts it down. I admit that I might have preferred seeing a good deal of what appears in motion No. 3 in a special section of our rules dealing with committees, but the point is that there are two avenues to go down, and the government has chosen neither. As will be remembered, when the bill setting up the committee to deal with statutory instruments was dealt with the procedure had to be spelled out in the bill, but under our rules it is totally deficient. The same could be said about certain tax convention bills where, due again to a refusal by the government House leader to refer matters to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, the appropriate changes have not been made in the rules with regard to affirmative and negative resolutions.

Unless Your Honour is able to indicate to me a particular point he may have as the objection, it is a little bit, shall we say, like punching a pillow to have to consider it in advance. It always seems that the proposers of motions have to prove themselves innocent as far as their motions are concerned. If you, Mr. Speaker, could enlighten us as to what is concerning you with regard to this motion, then perhaps we could discuss that point.

● (1640)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will, I am sure, be aware, because he addressed himself to the point very directly, as to whether or not the amendment goes beyond the scope of the clause which it seeks to amend and in fact introduces a new principle into the legislation. The hon. member addressed himself to the point rather ably, I thought. That is the concern the Chair has expressed in procedural terms, and I will have to give careful consideration and examination to the proposed amendment and will endeavour to return to the chair as soon as I have an indication that the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) is here to make an argument with respect to his other motions.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Now that you have indicated, Mr. Speaker, the point that concerns you—

Mr. Speaker: I identified that point when I spoke on the motion of hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin).