

Appropriation Act No. 8

which we are concerned. Such a motion having been placed on the order paper and passed, the committee could make its own decision about calling the Auditor General. This is something the minister might consider.

Mr. Benson: I will certainly consider it.

Mr. Churchill: I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre for clarifying this matter. The minister now says he will consider the proposition which has been made to him. But can he not say, in view of the authority of his office, and in view of the seriousness of the situation, that he will undertake to do it, not just consider it? I am sure the house would pass such a motion without debate. In fact, I will make a commitment to that effect right now on behalf of this party.

Surely, the minister could go a little further and say he will do what we ask? If he would put down a motion referring the subject matter to the committee, we would pass it without debate. Remember, it would be 1968 before we would have the opinion of the Auditor General on the validity of this transaction in the ordinary course of events. I am casting no aspersions upon what the minister had done. The Auditor General reports to parliament with regard to financial transactions in this country, and what we are asking him to do is to deal with this particular transaction as soon as possible in case we should alter the method of dealing with estimates and supply in parliament in the fiscal year 1967-68.

I plead with the minister—and when I plead with members of this government it is a red letter day—to make this concession and to make this commitment. I am supported, I am sure, by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre who has a considerable knowledge of transactions here. In fact, I ask the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre whether he does not think that the Auditor General could give us a report at the earliest opportunity rather than in 1968. Again, I ask the minister to give us an assurance, not just to consider the matter.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Churchill: I suppose the news media would say I am holding up the business of the house, filibustering and so on. But this is a matter of serious importance in relation to the finances of our country. It is not just a silly notion that I am putting forward. I have made a reasonable request to this minister, and I

cannot understand why he cannot make a commitment to this house.

Mr. Benson: I have given everything to the hon. member that he has requested of me. I have said I would look into this matter and consider seriously what should be done.

• (5:40 p.m.)

That is the only commitment I can give because no one has put forward a proposition that I have had the opportunity of examining, other than the suggestion made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre a few minutes ago.

Mr. Starr: The minister says he wants an opportunity to give serious consideration to what should be done. I think he means how it could be done.

Mr. Benson: That is right.

Mr. Starr: In view of that, we are not going to quibble about how it is going to be done. Could the minister not say, "I will look into the situation to find out how it can be done and I will do it"? The request put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and others is a reasonable one. The minister has already given all the facts and laid the particulars on the table. We appreciate that very much, and what the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre asks is that these be referred to the committee in whatever form the minister finds it necessary to do so.

All the minister has to do is say, "I will give consideration to what method can be employed to have it referred to the committee, to be dealt with by the Auditor General, who will bring in his report as soon as possible, and this I will do as soon as I find the best method."

Mr. Wahn: Mr. Chairman, surely the minister's attitude is perfectly correct. He has tabled a legal opinion indicating that the procedure followed was completely correct and in accordance with the law. No one here can say with absolute certainty that in these circumstances it would be appropriate to refer this particular matter to the Auditor General. The Auditor General has a great deal to do investigating accounts of previous years, and he is following well established practices and procedures.

Nevertheless, the minister has said he will consider the suggestion made by hon. members opposite. Surely, in view of the legal opinion that has been obtained, and the length of time taken on this general subject, that is