

CANADA

House of Commons Debates

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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Speaker: HON. THOMAS SIMPSON SPROULE.

Friday, March 12, 1915.

The House met at Three o'clock, the Speaker in the Chair.

WAR APPROPRIATION EXPENDITURE.

Mr. A. K. MACLEAN (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I desire to move the resolution of which I gave notice:

That sessional papers numbered 122 of the present session of Parliament, being copies of correspondence between the Auditor General and the Department of Militia and other departments of Government in respect of the expenditures under the War Appropriations Act, be referred to the Committee on Public Accounts, with power to investigate the matters therein referred to and to report thereon to this House: that the committee have power to send for persons, papers and records, and to examine witnesses on oath or affirmation, and to report from time to time.

Mr. SPEAKER: The last portion of the resolution, with regard to examining witnesses under oath, is not necessary, as the committee already has that power.

Rt. Hon. Sir ROBERT BORDEN (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the question as to investigation by the Public Accounts Committee into matters that have not been referred to that committee in the ordinary way has more than once engaged the attention of the House since I became a member of Parliament. I may say a word as to the practice adopted in the past. First, as to accounts of past years the committee would be empowered to inquire into matters referred in such previous years only if the committee itself reports that this is desirable; and probably without such a report the House would make the reference to the extent to which the investigation into matters transpiring in previous years might prove necessary to an investigation of the accounts referred to the committee in the regular way. This is

not a motion to investigate matters referred to in previous years, but it is a motion to investigate matters which have transpired during the current year. Up to the present time I have been unable to find that such a course has been taken. I observe that as far back as 1902 a member of the late Administration, speaking for the Administration, laid it down as an absolutely unheard of thing that matters which had transpired during the then current fiscal year should be referred to the Public Accounts Committee, inasmuch as, in ordinary course, they would come to that committee during the ensuing year.

However, the correspondence that has been brought down indicates that some of the questions which have been raised by the Auditor General demand consideration, and, under the circumstances, I am not disposed to offer any opposition to the motion which has been made by the hon. junior member for Halifax. My hon. friend the Minister of Militia and Defence, whom I consulted on the subject, informed me that he desired to welcome the fullest possible investigation into the matters which are referred to in the correspondence with the Auditor General. He reminds me that in the return there does not seem to be any direct correspondence between the Auditor General and himself. In relation to that, it is pointed out in some of the documents brought down and laid on the table of the House yesterday that certain letters that are printed as having been sent by the Auditor General to the Department of Militia and Defence are alleged by the officers of that department never to have reached them at all.

I am also the more inclined to accede to the motion of the hon. member for Halifax for the reason that a member of this House, the hon. member for Carleton, Ont. (Mr. Garland), came to me some time ago and asked that matters in this correspondence that have been commented upon especially in the press of this country as touching