

the close of the year. When these documents were kept back so long members lost interest in them. This custom had nothing but a right to recommend it, and though some might claim it would be unconstitutional to change it, he did not see why the House should forego its privilege.

Mr. SINCLAIR thought the House should be satisfied with the declaration of the Government that efforts would be made to bring down these reports and statements at the earliest possible moment. As no doubt it was desirable they should be brought down. He moved in amendment to the motion:—

That all the words of the resolution after the word "the late" be struck out, and the following inserted in lieu thereof:—"That the practice has been that the Departmental reports other than the Educational Report and the Public Accounts in detail for every year are brought down, printed, and distributed at the first session thereafter, and that this House is glad to learn from the Government that such arrangements have been devised as will permit hereafter the Public Accounts of each year in detail being laid before this House at the first session next after the close of the year to which such Accounts relate."

Mr. WOOD admitted that it was desirable to have the Public Accounts brought down as early as possible after the end of the year or the beginning of the session. But it was impossible with the present staff to go on and complete the Public Accounts in detail in such a short time. The work of making out the accounts was not one of copying, but one of collection, and could only be done under very careful supervision. The Government, however, had a system under consideration by which, either by increased assistance or otherwise, the Public Accounts of the preceding year would be brought down at the yearly session of the House.

Mr. WILLS agreed with the mover of the motion, that the present system was a faulty one. It was absurd to say that the Public Accounts Committee could now thoroughly investigate the accounts of the year, and he was glad to hear that the Government intended to alter their system to bring about the desired improvement.

Mr. LAUDER had always been in favour of a change in the direction indicated, and congratulated the Hon. Treasurer upon meeting the wishes of the House. He might say indeed that that hon. gentleman generally showed a desire to comply in matters of detail with the wishes of the minority.

Mr. MERRICK said that the amendment did not cover the same ground as the motion, as the Government did not propose to bring down during the session the accounts of the year preceding the one in which the session was held. He pointed out that the difficulties which had stood in the way of bringing down the Public Accounts at an early date had apparently been got rid of, because the totals were given in the statement of receipts and expenditure laid before members during each session.

Mr. CREIGHTON asked the Hon. Treasurer if the arrangements made by the Government included the bringing down of the Public Accounts of 1878 during the present session.

Mr. WOOD said that he had pointed out that the difficulties in the way were such as to prevent that being done. The intention of the Government was that in the future they would provide means for bringing down the Public Accounts in the way his hon. friend had indicated.

Mr. CREIGHTON said that the Hon. Treasurer's answer was an unsatisfactory one. He continued at some length to show the desirability of having the reports brought down in the way his motion indicated.

Mr. MEREDITH asked if the Government proposed to place the Public Accounts for 1878 in the hands of the people before the next general elections.

Mr. WOOD had already pointed out the impossibility of bringing them down this session.

Mr. MEREDITH moved in amendment,

That all the words in the proposed amendment after the word "thereof," where it first occurs, be struck out, and the following substituted therefor:—"That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that the Public Accounts in detail for the year 1878 should be in the hands of the people before the ensuing general elections."

Mr. FRASER said that all that was asked by the hon. member for North Grey was that the Accounts should be distributed to members of the House when the House

was not in session, and that was resisted by the Government on the constitutional ground that the reports must be first brought before the people's Parliament assembled. It was only when the Parliament was so assembled that members had any authoritative character at all. The amendment proposed by the hon. member for London went a great deal further than that proposed by his hon. friend from North Grey. The hon. member for London said that it was desirable that the reports, although not printed and distributed to the House, should be distributed to the whole people of the country—that every person resident in Ontario should have a copy of the Public Accounts. How else were they "to be laid before the people"? After the present Legislature was dissolved there would be no Parliament before whom the Public Accounts could be laid. Everything in the nature of a safeguard was proposed to be swept away by the amendment of the hon. member for London. The Government had always upheld that it was desirable to place the Public Accounts before members in the session next after the past year. Some of the reports, such as that of the Education Department, could not by any possibility be brought down at that time. He did not think that the House had so little reverence for old constitutional landmarks as to do away with a practice that was one of long standing, when a remedy for the defect was provided by the amendment proposed by the member for North Bruce.

Mr. CREIGHTON characterized the statement of the Hon. Commissioner for Public Works, that the people were not entitled to know what had been done with their money except when Parliament was in session, as rubbish. It was absurd to suppose that any harm would result from the Public Accounts' reports being distributed before they were laid before the House. Unless the Government intended to keep the people in ignorance as to the way in which the public expenditure had been made, he could see nothing to hinder the accounts for 1878 being brought down before the end of the present session.

Mr. DEACON thought it strange that the Treasurer should not have risen to oppose the resolution of the hon. member for London and that the Attorney-General should have remained silent also. He believed the motion could not bear the construction put upon it by the Commissioner of Public Works when he said that it meant that a copy of the Public Accounts was to be put in the hands of each citizen in the Province. If the Accounts were kept back until after the general election, and the Government secured another lease of power, they would do so by reserving from the people information which they were entitled to have.

Mr. CURRIE was surprised at the length to which the discussion had reached. He did not see why the original motion should not pass, as no harm could result from the distribution of these reports before they were laid upon the table. He did not understand why it was not possible to bring down these accounts before the close of the session, for it was merely a question of printing, and the members of the House really needed them. He agreed with the mover of the original motion that when brought down so late the accounts had lost their interest, not only to members of the House, but to the country as well.

Mr. MOWAT said the Opposition had always failed in making a case against the Government, even when they had the Public Accounts in their hands to quote from, and anything they had attempted to establish could have been proven quite as well from the statement of receipts and expenditure. Very good use could always be made of the Public Accounts by the friends of the Government in justifying the course which they had adopted. The Government could have no possible interest in keeping back the Public Accounts, because the only effect of such delay was to injure themselves. He had been somewhat surprised at the statement made by an hon. member opposite that the Attorney-General should have spoken upon this question when it came up. He did not see that the question of the Public Accounts was one particularly calling for the attention of the Attorney-General.

Mr. MORRIS—Except as Premier.