

*Transportation*

continued, but it is only at this late date that this notice appears on the order paper. The personnel of the committee has not been established and there is no indication when the committee will sit. We may well find ourselves in a position where the committee will have only a month to deal with the important question of rule changes.

This example points up better than anything else the attitude of government, be it this or any other, toward the establishment of committees of any kind; and because of the tremendous importance of this legislation, and the fantastic powers it will give to the new transport commission, it should not be left to the government to say when a committee is going to be established, what terms of reference it is going to have, and when it is to commence its duties.

It is not good enough for members of the opposition to have to come hat in hand to the government and ask, "Will you please set up this committee?" Then, when the committee is set up, it is not good enough that they should have to come hat in hand to the government and ask, "Will you please establish the personnel of the committee?" and "Will you please give its terms of reference so that the committee can start operating?"

This is a procedure which will have to be changed, and my amendment is an attempt to change it in connection with this bill. An objection has been raised with respect to the Senate and its role. But that objection is not tenable, Mr. Chairman. In my amendment I make it quite plain that the members of the committee will be appointed "according to the practice of this house" and that the standing orders of the house "shall prevail with regard to the meetings and acts of the said committee." All that the Senate is called upon to do, as a constituent part of the parliament of Canada, is agree to the fact that there is going to be a committee, which then makes it mandatory on the government to see the committee is established, and with respect to the provision as to secrecy it is the committee, and only the committee, which decides that that is essential.

• (8:50 p.m.)

Under those circumstances how can it be said that there is an inclusion of the other place or a change in the standing orders of this house in this regard when it has been spelled out specifically that this is not the case. I submit that this is not a real argument. Some suggestion has been made by the minister that the government has initiated very

[Mr. Baldwin.]

valuable and useful recommendations in respect of committees. Reference was made to the defence committee. I am glad to see that the Minister of National Defence is here. If one looks back through the record he will realize that this was a very unfortunate choice. It was the Minister of National Defence who stood up in his place and said consistently that a minister of the crown had the right, if he saw fit, to say that certain witnesses should not be called before a committee, save with his permission. He also said that the evidence of a certain type of witness must be subject to review by the minister. I think I am paraphrasing fairly accurately what the minister said in respect of these specific points. This was supported by the Prime Minister. I asked the Prime Minister about this, and as I understand it he and the members of the government supported this position. Surely this points up the absolute necessity for placing some curb on the powers of the government with regard to committees and their operations.

Reference was made, I think by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, to the public accounts committee as being a prestigious committee which should not be subject to this sort of operation. It is in respect of the public accounts committee that the parliament of Australia has seen fit to provide for statutory terms of reference. For some years I have been in touch with members of the public accounts committee of Australia. From time to time they have courteously sent me copies of their deliberations. This committee, operating under a statute, performs a most valuable function. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that there is no right on the part of the government to curb the establishment of the committee or alter its terms of reference.

In view of this I suggest that what has been said by the minister and other hon. members does not constitute any real valid objection to the points I have raised. In my opinion the government takes the position it does for the same reason any government would; that is, it is a question of power. A government naturally seeks power and has a reluctance to give up any of that power. If this amendment should be passed it would have the effect of taking from the government some of the powers it now holds with regard to the appointment of committees.

Quite frankly in my opinion the government should have the power to establish committees, commissions, and tribunals. I have no objection to that, provided however that this