

bear pretty close scrutiny. For instance, he suggested that witnesses had been prevented from appearing before the national resources and public works committee by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. MacDonald). As we look at the evidence, and surely he did not substantiate his claim very well, this is just not so. I am aware of no witness who has been summoned by the national resources and public works committee and who has not appeared.

● (1720)

The work of the committee has involved some 20 meetings since January. The steering committee has set out a schedule of witnesses, and whether it has been in respect of the miscellaneous estimates, the study of the international energy agreement, the study of Petro-Can, the departmental estimates or the estimates of Crown corporations and other agencies, representatives of which appear before this committee, in no way has the minister prevented any witness from appearing. Likewise, on some occasion these witnesses have appeared before the committee without the minister or his parliamentary secretary being present.

It seems to me that the question we have before us today is whether the hon. member for Peace River really believes in responsible government. One of his allegations was that we really have government by bureaucrats, for bureaucrats—and I forget the rest of that couplet. I suppose if you really believe that bureaucrats make all the decisions, then, as he feels, he should be able to question them on matters of policy. We do not believe that on this side of the House. We believe ministers are responsible for the setting of policy and they should have to answer questions on policy before parliamentary committees. We believe that civil servants, when they appear with or without the minister or parliamentary secretary, are there to answer questions relating to information or administration.

The first statement in the motion of the hon. member for Peace River reads:

That this House: Holds that it tends to a contempt of parliament and a subversion of the constitution to assert, as did the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources before a standing committee of this House in a previous Session, that a minister of the Crown may order a witness not to attend a committee or to withhold evidence from the committee where, in the minister's opinion, the witness has an advisory responsibility to the minister or the government—

Let us go from that and just see what the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said on the occasion referred to, and I quote from the record of the national resources and public works committee meeting of December 18, 1973, at page 24:14. He said:

Mr. Chairman, I might speak to the suggestion concerning Mr. Stabback who is a public servant and in his capacity as a member of the National Energy Board is one of my advisers. I have no objection whatsoever to appearing with Mr. Stabback and having him answer questions on matters of information—

It does not seem that the hon. member has substantiated well his claim that the witness was prevented or ordered not to attend.

Mr. Baldwin: What about what he said on page 33, which I read?

### *Committee Procedure*

**Mr. Foster:** The second claim is that the minister was forcing the witness to withhold evidence from the committee. Let me complete the rest of the sentence that I read in part:

—but as one of my advisers for whom I am constitutionally responsible, I would have to appear when he appears. It should be understood that I will appear with the witness and, of course, I would be quite agreeable but from a constitutional standpoint, he has been acting as an adviser to me and as such should appear in my presence.

It seems to me the situation is that when a committee hearing is taking place, we do not have questions put by members of parliament in a neatly compartmentalized way but, rather, questions that involve matters of administration and policy. If a good committee meeting is to be held with information being supplied, we should have people in attendance who can answer questions on policy and on administration information as well. This is what the minister was saying, that if a member of his department or an adviser to him is to appear, he should be able to attend the committee to answer in respect of matters relating to policy.

The second paragraph of the hon. member's motion before the House this afternoon reads as follows:

Informs the minister and others of the government that the implementation of this pernicious doctrine by obstruction, threat, intimidation, molestation, offer of advantage, other corrupt practice, or at all, is a crime against the law and custom of parliament—

That is pretty strong stuff. I do not know if that is the kind of language the hon. member for Peace River would normally use, but it certainly does not—

**Mr. Baldwin:** It is among my mildest.

**Mr. Foster:** He talks that way on opposition days; however, he did not talk early enough last Thursday, apparently, because that was a pretty weak and pathetic performance. I admit that he probably made the best presentation possible from that side of the House, but it was a pretty weak performance on the whole.

It seems to me that we have very serious allegations in the hon. member's motion this afternoon, but we do not have much substance to back them up. We have a minister of the Crown saying that when there are matters of policy being put before a standing committee to the House of Commons, the minister will or can be there to answer those questions and that civil servants will and can answer questions relating to administration or information. If we look at the proceedings of the national resources and public works committee we will find that on occasion witnesses have appeared without the minister being present and in those circumstances, of course, the witnesses have had to turn aside questions on policy.

**Mr. Baldwin:** Well coached ahead of time.

**Mr. Foster:** It is rather interesting that the hon. member for Peace River should have referred to the public accounts committee, because surely there is no other committee that day after day, year after year and committee session after committee session has called more witnesses, deputy ministers and other officials on matters relating to administration. The hon. member really weakened his argument by even raising that matter, because everyone knows how many times officials from every department of