

nipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I indicated the government's view. The government would like this select committee to have as broad a reference as possible so that it can decide the areas in which it will undertake its work.

I hope that the hon. member will answer the question with regard to his amendment. As to why he did not answer in his speech, I do not know, but I invite him to answer and to indicate why, for the first time in history that I can recall, there is an attempt by the official opposition to limit an issue which is being sent to a committee of the House of Commons. Is there something which I do not know? Is there something which the opposition is trying to hide?

**Mr. MacEachen:** You obviously don't know.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** The opposition House leader says that I do not know. He is quite right. I have been in government for only six months and have not had a chance to delve into many things. I must say that I am a little alarmed not only at the proposal to limit the work of the committee, but also that it would be supported by my good friend, the opposition House leader, because I would think that he, in his position, would want the fullest possible scope given to the committees.

That is the reason for my intervention. I am very concerned about this attitude which would somehow propose to limit a government proposal to Parliament. I hope that this approach of limitation is not supported in this House. I would hope that the wish of all members of the House would be to have the fullest possible scope in the terms of reference of committees so that the committees may decide for themselves whether they wish to limit the reference. There has been too much limitation put on committees of this House. This is one committee to which the government has given broad terms of reference, and I hope that the House will support those terms of reference.

**Mr. Johnston:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, could I have some clarification on my position. I have been asked a question by the government House leader, and I would like to know at this point if I have the opportunity of responding to that question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCain):** To answer the question, I would think yes.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had thought that during my speech the government House leader was in the House, but it is apparent from his remarks that he was not, or that if he was here physically, he was not here in spirit. I made it very clear at the outset that cost overruns were the purpose, the *raison d'être*, of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I was not suggesting that we should in any way fetter parliamentary inquiries into the activities or projects in question. I simply make the point that the public accounts committee is a standing committee of this House and has a permanent order of reference from the Auditor General's report to look into those very projects. The government simply wants to add another committee that will duplicate the work of

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the public accounts committee at the expense of the Canadian public.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCain):** Order. I suggest the hon. member is now approaching debate and that his point of order has been made.

**Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, some minutes ago I thought that the Chair had declared the amendment carried, but then the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker) got up and spoke as though he thought he was speaking to the amendment. I gather that the House is acting as though the amendment is still before the Chamber. Does Your Honour want to straighten that out?

● (1640)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCain):** The matter is still before the chamber. The amendment was not carried.

**Mr. Knowles:** I am prepared to accept that. I think there has been a fair amount of misunderstanding. At any rate, we are still debating it and it seems to be the hope that if members can speak as freely and lengthily as did the President of the Privy Council, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens) may eventually get here. I am surprised that he ever left the chamber when this important motion was before us.

I must say to my friend the President of the Privy Council that I am startled at his being startled at this motion, as though it has a restrictive effect. As I heard the speech of the President of the Treasury Board, his main justification for this committee alongside the public accounts committee, was that the public accounts committee deals with history and this one will deal with the present and the future.

I gather that all that the hon. member for Saint-Henri-Westmount (Mr. Johnston) wants to do is to make sure that the new committee will not go back into questions of ancient history. He wants the committee to have the power to investigate ongoing major government projects. I suspect that Mirabel is past, present and future, so it is ongoing. The amendment will not cut that out. I suspect, however, the amendment would cut out an investigation into the activities of Colonel By when he built the Rideau Canal!

**Mr. Nystrom:** And Stanley was here.

**Mr. Knowles:** Is that not what the hon. member for Saint-Henri-Westmount wants, namely, to ensure that this new committee will not conflict with the public accounts committee in being able to go back and dig up old projects that are completed? In other words, the new committee, in the terms of my hon. friend's amendment, would be able to deal with projects starting now or projects already in place which are continuing.

If that is the basis, I believe the President of the Privy Council ought either to accept the amendment or give us the same kind of undertaking that he gave us on Friday with respect to the committee on FIRA. We were concerned then