

tial system? There is a minister responsible for every person in the Prime Minister's office, and that minister can be questioned here—similarly with all other ministers.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): My point here—I apologize if I have not made it—is that with most ministers we have two chances to ask questions. We have the inadequate opportunity here in the House of Commons during the daily question period, but the real opportunity that we have to gather information about the day to day operations of their departments is in the standing committees. Neither the Prime Minister nor the senior staff is in the habit of appearing before standing committees. If my recollection is correct—the hon. member will know because he was in that office at the time—last year the Prime Minister declined an invitation to appear before a standing committee. So we do not have an opportunity to question his officials in the same way that we have an opportunity to question the officials of other ministers.

This opportunity is particularly important in view of the immense power they wield as co-ordinators of the officials in the privy council office and the Prime Minister's office. The hon. member for Scarborough East used the word presidential. That is his word, and is his system. It is my fear that what we are developing is, in effect, a presidential system under which the Prime Minister can operate without any real responsibility to this House, under which he cannot be questioned and his officials cannot be questioned.

The reason one worries about this, and the reason it is of concern now is not simply that the Prime Minister of the day happens to belong to a party other than my own. It might be that as the universe continues to unfold we will move across to that side of the House and we will have a Prime Minister from our party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): So my concern is not about a particular individual or group of individuals, it is about the system that we are establishing, the institutions that we are developing, and the way we are changing the nature of government in Canada.

As I said earlier, I agree with the motives of the Prime Minister in trying to establish around him as political head of the government what has been called, in the words of a former editor of *Cité Libre*, a countervailing force to the public service. But I make the point that there is in our system another countervailing force to the power of government, and it is this House of Commons. The danger is that a serious imbalance is growing between the power of the Prime Minister and the cabinet and the capacity to countervail that power in this House of Commons.

I raise these matters now because, despite the scope of the change that we have seen in the way we are governed here, this bill is unfortunately the only specific opportunity that we in this House have to discuss this very serious change in the nature of the government of Canada. That is to say, it is unless the Prime Minister, when he brings forward the changes in the rules that he is proposing—or perhaps I should say threatening—also proposes a means by which we, as an institution, can control those new

Federal-Provincial Relations

agencies that have grown up to create the imbalance between the power of the ministry and of this parliament.

I want to speak very briefly about those fellows and the very few women in the public service who earn so much more than do members of the House of Commons, namely, our senior public servants, particularly those who are appointed at the discretion of the Prime Minister and who do not have to go through the Public Service Commission. I repeat, I can understand and approve personally of the Prime Minister's desire, as political head of the government, to try to control and direct his own government and not let the job be done by senior public servants. But I think it would be wrong for us to ignore the fact that there has been in recent days, indeed years, reason for suspicion that appointments to senior positions have been for reasons other than merit. I suggest these reasons have also to do with loyalty, not necessarily loyalty to a party but loyalty to a point of view that might be embodied in a minister.

I think it would be a very real danger, particularly in a country of such diversity, and frankly such fragility, as Canada, if we developed, in effect, a personal public service at the senior level. The appointment of Mr. Pitfield clearly raises the fear, as do the consequent resignations—I use those words deliberately—of other senior deputy ministers in tandem, that we are developing a public service that is chosen not simply because of its competence but also because of its loyalty to the particular point of view that happens to occupy the treasury benches at the present time. That is a serious situation for our system of government to face.

There is one other aspect I want to touch on today and it relates also to parliament and our powers and prerogatives. It is very clear to me, and I think to many members on this side of the House, that the growth in formal relations and conferences between the federal government and the provincial governments, indeed the various levels of government, seriously threatens to undercut the authority and the role of the House of Commons. There is the inexorable danger that these new processes that we are developing will by-pass parliament and will mean that decisions are taken at some place other than this place; and it is this place where, under our system, decisions are supposed to be taken.

Reference was made earlier by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona to the discussions that took place at the Western Economic Opportunities Conference in Calgary in the summer of 1973. At that time issues of great importance to western Canada were raised by the premiers, and commitments were given by various ministers. Many of those commitments have not been honoured, but that is not really the point. The point is that the demands made during those few days in Calgary by the premiers were demands that had been made time and time again, year after year after year, by members of the House of Commons. The difference was that in Calgary, in speaking to the premiers the ministers gave commitments; in the House of Commons, speaking to members of parliament, the representatives of those regions, the government was evasive or gave no answers at all.

Mr. Mazankowski: Contempt of parliament.