

not going to be resolved in the standing committees until we work out some system by which members agree that solutions reached in committee are equitable and fair.

I feel that the current system of appointing chairmen, and the way committee business is handled by the steering committees and committees themselves, leave a great deal to be desired. We have to look for substantial reforms in this area.

I want to deal more specifically with the proposition advanced by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin). At the start I think we should make clear what he is talking about. In his motion the hon. member alleges that the committee has been tampered with in so far as a member of the Public Service, and adviser to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald), was not permitted to testify before it. I would say that a committee of the House of Commons has certain rights to command the attendance of certain people before it to give evidence on certain subjects.

Mr. Baldwin: It is a very dangerous doctrine.

Mr. Reid: I would say that when it comes to compelling people to appear before the committee, the committee does not have that power. It is within the power of the House of Commons, however, to compel somebody to appear either before the bar of the House or before a standing committee, but a committee itself has very limited powers in that area. Let me give an example, Madam Speaker.

Committees are generally given the power to summon persons, papers and records. We have seen a number of examples of those powers being exercised. When a committee has before it the estimates of a government department, however, or a bill of the House of Commons, then it seems to me that the only witness a committee has power to compel to attend is the minister who has sponsored that legislation in the House, or the minister who is responsible for the estimates for which he has signed and which are before the House, and which the House has referred to the committee.

In our system ministers are responsible for decisions taken; civil servants are not responsible for decisions taken. That is why ministers sit in the House of Commons, it is why they answer questions and why they take responsibility. If we were to accept the doctrine that civil servants were responsible for these decisions, then perhaps civil servants should be invited to sit on the treasury benches in this House of Commons so that they could be responsible to the House.

That is not the system, however. Our system is clear, exact and precise. Decisions are taken by ministers—they are imputed to have been taken by them even though they have not in fact been taken by the ministers. Ministers stand and fall in the House of Commons defending those decisions taken by them and the advisers who work for them and under their authority.

I recall one occasion when a minister was in deep trouble in this House over a decision that had been taken by his advisers, and about which he had not been aware. He told me, "There are at least 92,000 public servants in my department. If by nine o'clock in the morning Ottawa

time one of them somewhere has not got me into trouble over something, then obviously the department is not doing its job." He acknowledged that he accepted responsibility for the activity of public servants engaged in implementing policies to which he had given concurrence, and implementing decisions in which he had participated with his colleagues.

I think we should make it quite clear that when a minister's estimates are before a committee, or when a bill is before a committee, that committee does have the power to compel the minister to appear before it, or a representative of the government to appear before it. I would even go further and argue that if a committee wished to have outside advice from somebody who is beyond the government pale, somebody who is an expert in the university or business field, the committee would have power to compel him to appear before it and give testimony. But I make a clear distinction between the committee's power to do that and the power the committee has to compel members of the government to appear. I believe this is an important distinction, because in the case of the government it is crystal clear that employees are responsible for the activities, responsible for their proposals—which after all is what the estimates are and what a bill is. The people brought in by committees—and they do this and it is a desirable practice—are there to give testimony to the committee within the bounds of their specialized knowledge. That is one of the reasons why committees have taken advantage of this, to call people before them, some of whom have not always been happy to appear, but whose testimony has been valuable.

I can recall a number of instances when I was chairman of a committee when in order to obtain information on what was going on we requested the presence of an individual who had prepared a report for the government on a particular subject. That gentleman came before us and gave testimony on what we wanted. We found his testimony quite useful. We did not get the government report we wanted, but we got the use of the expert witness who had immersed himself in the subject and who was not in the public service. Madam Speaker, I see it is six o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Order, please. The hour appointed for private members' business having expired I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock tonight.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.