

mittee on Statutory Instruments and I believe also on the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada. In both these committees we heard public servants who were unaccompanied by their ministers, but this was done with the knowledge and authorization of the ministers. In fact I can recall speaking to the ministers on those occasions to see whether they would have objections to their public servants appearing on their own before the committee. Because of the limited nature of the inquiries that were being made and the fact that where a policy was involved it was so well-known that it was thought no confusion could arise, the ministers said that it would be perfectly all right with them if the public servants appeared on their own.

In case of the Public Accounts Committee as my colleague, the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster), said, it has enjoyed the greatest possible freedom in the investigation of witnesses, a freedom I am sure all members of the House would like to see continued. But the fact is that it is the minister who is responsible. If the minister chooses to appear on his own, or chooses to appear with his public servants and to take full responsibility and fully explain to the parliamentary committee what has happened, that is the minister's responsibility.

Mr. Baldwin: Would the hon. member permit a question? I would like to ask the hon. member a question regarding his interesting comments. I hope it is taken off his time because he is entitled to full time. Does he urge the adoption of the principle with respect to the Public Accounts Committee that if a minister see fit to instruct a public servant who had been asked by the committee to appear before it not to go, the public servant would not be allowed to appear before the committee?

Mr. MacGuigan: In my opinion, if the minister refused permission for that public servant to appear before the committee, it would be the minister's responsibility, and he himself would have to explain to the committee why he did not allow the public servant to attend. The minister would have to take the political consequences of his decision. That is what the discussion is all about, the responsibility of the government for the political consequences.

Governments cannot escape their responsibility merely by allowing some public servant to take the rap, at least if it is a matter which involves the normal implementation of government policy. There may be an unusual situation where a public servant has been indulging in a frolic of his own for which he himself deserves to bear individual responsibility, but in a case such as that the government would want to cut that man loose from its protection. However, in a more normal situation it is the government which has responsibility, before the committee and before the House, as well as before the public.

I am pleased the House leader of the opposition has cited the origins of the doctrine of responsible government in Canada, the doctrine which those great Liberals, Baldwin and Lafontaine, brought to this country, and which had been developed earlier in Britain as a result of the actions of earlier Liberals. It is a doctrine to which we on this side fully subscribe. I hope the fact that the other party came later to it in historical sequence does not mean that their devotion to it is any less, but that they are prepared to join

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with us in re-affirming the fact that this is not only a parliamentary democracy, but that it is also one based on responsible government.

● (1740)

Obviously there have to be some bounds to responsible government, and there can be some argument as to the difficult cases, but the kind of case to which the House leader of the Official Opposition is referring is not a difficult case. What he is proposing is flying against the mainstream of parliamentary tradition. It is not a doubtful or difficult case at all. He is proposing that a committee should have the right to summon a public servant apart from his minister. If the doctrine of responsible government means anything it means that the minister is the one who is primarily responsible; he is the one who has the duty to answer for his public servant and the actions of his public servant.

I often wonder what is behind this attack, and others of this kind, by hon. members opposite. I suspect that their motivation is very political. In view of the kind of declarations we hear from the hon. member for Peace River and sometimes from the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark), members who, certainly in the case of the hon. member for Peace River, understand the parliamentary system so well that we can hardly believe that they stumble unknowingly on these positions which they are putting forth, I suspect that there is a kind of design on the part of hon. members opposite to confuse the public about what is happening in parliament today, and to suggest that there is something completely unwarranted happening.

We hear cries from those opposite that the parliamentary system is being changed into a presidential system. They present the parliamentary system as it should be in terms of, for example, Bagehot's "Constitution of England," of 1867, which, as hon. members opposite well know, describes the British House of Commons for a period of some 30 to 40 years between the first and second reform bills and only that period of parliamentary history out of the 300 or 400 years of parliamentary history.

During all the rest of that period the meaning of parliament has carried with it a certain supremacy of the executive, often too much, and I often join with hon. members opposite in suggesting ways in which the powers of the executive should be limited. I might say also that I join with them on many occasions in suggesting that the principle of open government is of crucial importance to the future of democracy in this country, but I cannot go along with hon. members opposite when they try to depart from these valid principles and valid suggestions about the needs of parliamentary democracy today, and to perpetrate on the people—and I think it is nothing less than a perpetration—extensions of those doctrines and distortions of what is happening so as to suggest that the government, in effect, is not following parliamentary tradition.

We are here dealing with the mainstream. We are not talking about doubtful cases at all. The hon. member opposite, if he were to be taken seriously, would be making a subversive attack on the very foundation of our system of parliamentary democracy. I do not think he