

*Refitting of HMCS "Bonaventure"*

present government continues to evade what should be their responsibility in connection with every executive act of the government, our present system of government will disappear. I do not know what will supplant it, but I am sure it will be much poorer.

The reason I am so concerned about this matter is that, as I said, the basic principle of ministerial responsibility is being evaded in this case. I do not think it should be evaded. I think that of the ministers who are responsible for these departments the only one who is still on the treasury benches is the President of the Treasury Board. The hon. member for Trinity has left the government. There is no question in my mind whatever that the present minister, who is an old friend of mine—we served together in the war, and so forth and so on—

**Mr. Drury:** Especially "and so on."

**Mr. Harkness:** —and had a very pleasant time, but he is still in my view, in spite of all, evading his responsibility.

**Mr. MacEwan:** Resign!

**Mr. Harkness:** When I was interrupted by the President of the Privy Council I was going to say that the greatest example of this in recent times was the Crichel Down case in Great Britain, in 1954. I will explain later how I happen to know something about it. In any event, here was a case where a piece of land had been taken by the RAF for war purposes and when the RAF had no more use for it, the department of agriculture, a great bureaucratic organization, particularly in the U.K. at that time, thought they could run it better than the former owner. He kept on trying to get back control of the land, without success during the time the Labour government was in office.

Then the Labour government was defeated and the Conservatives came in. He went on for another two or three years trying to get it back. Eventually he raised so much hell that the matter became a big question in Parliament. Sir Thomas Dugdale, who was the minister of agriculture, although he really knew nothing about what had been going on because he had been given bad advice by his officials—this came out in the public inquiry which was held—was not really personally responsible. But in that Parliament the idea of ministerial responsibility was so firmly ingrained that Sir Thomas Dugdale insisted on resigning, and he did. As a matter of fact, this is what should happen in this Parliament.

[Mr. Harkness.]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard):** Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

**Some hon. Members:** Continue.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard):** Does the House give unanimous consent to allowing the hon. member to continue?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Harkness:** I thank hon. members for their indulgence. I will not keep them very much longer. As I was saying, the Crichel Down case is the outstanding example in recent times of a minister who really did not know what his officials were doing and who nevertheless took the responsibility and resigned as a result of it. As I started to say earlier, the reason I know something about the case is that the minister's successor came over to visit me. He was minister of agriculture when I held the same office here in 1957. I got a whole rundown on the case.

If we are going to continue parliamentary government, of which the basic ingredient is the responsibility of the executive to the Members of Parliament, then ministers will have to accept responsibility for what their officials do, whether or not they know anything about it. In fact, it does not make a bit of difference whether or not the officials have done something without the minister's knowledge, the minister still has to take responsibility for it. If he is not pleased, it is his job to fire the official who has not done a good job, or transfer him somewhere else. But so far as Parliament is concerned and so far as the people of Canada are concerned, the minister must take the responsibility. If he does not do so, our system is going to disappear. As I said, that is why I feel so strongly about this matter.

I will conclude by saying that I think the only good effect that can come from this debate and from the Standing Committee's public investigation of the matter would be for an effective measure to be taken. I put it to the government that they must take effective action to prevent the waste of public money, which has been apparent in this case and which has been apparent in a number of the other cases I have mentioned. If this is not done, the whole idea of trying to give more life to members of the House of Commons and to the House of Commons as a whole will come to nothing.

The only way in which the members of the House of Commons can exert any real influ-