

because there are reports that something else is in the wind—

An hon. Member: In what newspaper?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It was in the *Wall Street Journal*—we have to keep in touch with the organs of my hon. friends.

An hon. Member: Be careful, now.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I refer particularly to the statement in that newspaper that an announcement might not be made until after parliament has recessed. That is one of the favourite tricks of the government when it has something embarrassing to announce; it waits until parliament recesses before doing so.

As the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton pointed out, this session has already lasted—what is it—329 days. Before it ends it will probably have gone on for two full years from September, 1974, until September or October, 1976, and it is a session which has been characterized by messes. The present Minister of the Environment (Mr. Marchand), when he was minister of transport, came out with that truism about transportation policy being in a mess. It still is. At the moment, transportation policy, in particular with respect to aviation, is in a mess.

Agricultural policy is in a mess. There are messes with respect to energy, messes caused by the shortcomings of the government in the field of housing and environmental control. I suppose the word “mess” applies in a double way to our lakes, rivers and air—and because we have a government which cannot even manage to get a session of parliament over in the usual year or 18 months, we should not be surprised if it compounds this messy situation. When we turn to consider the anti-inflation program, we find that an extensive bureaucracy has been set up to make sure that wage increases do not take place beyond certain levels, though price increases continue to make life difficult for our people.

● (1640)

It is a two-year mess, this first session of the thirtieth parliament. Even if I cannot persuade my ministerial friends across the way to agree with the latter part of the motion, the fact is it is true that most of the Canadian people do not have confidence in the present government.

I want to say a word or two about one or two other things that are the cause of the lack of confidence. One of my friends across the way, if he were here, would say he knows what is coming, and he would be right. I know that a little bit was done in the first part of this session in respect of the Canada Pension Plan, but in the main this has been a very disappointing session of parliament in so far as the pensioners of Canada are concerned. No increase has been provided at all in the basic pension paid under old age security, except, of course, the cost of living increase that comes along every three months, always five or seven months behind, leaving our senior citizens in worse trouble as time goes on.

The one change that was made in the Old Age Security Act created another mess, and that is the provision for spouses' allowances which are payable only to persons who

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are married to and living with their spouses. I am speaking now of persons between 60 and 65 years of age. The allowance is not available to persons in that age bracket if they are spinsters, widows, bachelors or widowers. The letters we all get from persons who were not aware of what was happening in the debate express amazement. They suggest that surely this was an oversight or a failure to think the thing through, and that a government of a civilized country like Canada would not provide a pension for a spouse who has another spouse, since they can somehow get along, but would not provide it for a person who is living in the single status of any of the categories I have already mentioned.

That is a mess, and the fact that it is a mess has now been demonstrated by some answers to questions I received a few days ago to the effect that now there are about 200 cases a month of spouses who started to draw the pension but who are losing them because the elder spouse in the meantime has died. So many wives of 62 with husbands of 67, for example, were receiving the spouses' allowance. Then a few months later this generous Liberal government takes that allowance away, because the other spouse has died. The word “mess” certainly applies down the line.

We had a bill earlier in this session, Bill C-52, that had to do with the pensions in the public service. There, again, the government failed to meet a number of very crucial situations. We took care of our own pensions, of course; we seemed to be able to do that. We took care of our pay a year or so ago, over my objection. But in terms of the needs of many of our people, these needs have not been met during the course of this session.

In addition to all these other things, the difficulties we are having with relations in the public service, and so on, we have a total picture that nobody on that side can look at with any sense of pride. When the vote is called on this motion, it is pretty clear how we will vote. We will vote for it because what it says is true, that there ought to be an affirmation of the importance of the convention of ministerial responsibility. It is also true when it says that this House—and, I would add, the majority of the people of Canada—no longer has confidence in that government across the way.

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, today this House is here to discuss ministerial responsibility. Rather than examining a specific policy or decision, our objective is to look at something which is less tangible but perhaps of greater import, namely, the conduct of government per se, for it is this, the conduct of government, which is at the core of ministerial responsibility. What, though, is meant by this term which is bruited about so freely?

In Canada, the basis of the term lies in the British tradition that a minister is responsible for the probity of his ministry and of its employees. We seem, however, to have modified this principle somewhat. There are now few who would extend this notion to make the minister responsible for the honesty and propriety of every action of his department. While this has reduced the range of ministerial responsibility, a new connotation has added a dimension to the term.