

Ministerial Responsibility

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Rubbish! The public service is demoralized.

Mr. Mackasey: Unfortunately the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton, whom I respect, cannot be here at present because he must attend to certain other matters. No matter what he says, he cannot suggest that any other government has done more for the public service than the present government. We have given them high wages, a good pension plan with indexation, the right to organize, the right to strike, an ample grievance procedure, and an official languages act which the opposition can either accept or not accept. I do not know what the opposition would do but, speaking for myself as part of the minority in the province in which I live, I know the government does not intend to retreat from its determination to open as many careers in Ottawa as possible to bilingual people of this country. Under our policy those who are not bilingual are given the opportunity to become bilingual.

Provisions in the act, known as grandfather clauses, say that certain people, because of their seniority in years and length of service in the public service, need not take language courses. For example, in post offices in Montreal I know there are people without the ability to learn the other language. Because of their years of service in the public service they are entitled to continue as unilingual employees and will not suffer for their inability to learn the other language.

The new person entering the public service is being asked to learn the other language. This qualification is not necessarily a prerequisite. Once the new employee has joined the public service, where it is necessary he or she is asked to take advantage of the opportunity to learn the other language. It is to the everlasting credit of many hon. members opposite and members of my party that members of parliament as well as public servants have taken advantage of this program.

When the opposition bemoan the fate of the public service and try to paint the Liberal government as the enemy of the public service, I suggest it is doing this only because of the upcoming by-election. It is trying to paint this government, as I say, as anti-public service. But it should not be forgotten that day after day in the House of Commons members of the opposition rise to complain about the wages of public servants and about their numbers. They ask, when will we reduce the bureaucracy, or the public service, by 5,000 or 50,000? The opposition raises such questions almost every day.

Mr. Benjamin: Which part of the opposition?

Mr. Mackasey: The official opposition. Day after day its members get up in the House and complain about the size of the bureaucracy. When they are talking about the bureaucracy, they are not talking about the minister, the member of parliament. They are talking about the poor public servant who, day in and day out, has to grit his teeth as somebody gets up during the question period and questions why he has got a job.

● (1740)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Mackasey.]

Mr. Mackasey: When the opposition says that this has been an unproductive parliament, I refer them to the hundred bills that have been passed in what is a record session of parliament. There was the Petro-Can Act, the Federal Business Development Act, the Citizenship Act which is already through second reading, amendments to the Canada Pension Plan Act, the Salaries Act, the CRTC changes, the amendments to the War Veterans' Allowances Act which my colleague brought in at a time of austerity. I give credit to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who had a part in that.

There was the Lieutenant Governors Superannuation Act, the Environmental Contaminants Act, amendments to the Customs Tariff Act, the Animal Disease and Protection Act, the Canada Business Corporation Act, the Petroleum Administration Act, and to the National Housing Act which latter are already resulting in record building.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: There were amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act coming forward from a joint committee of the House of Commons and Senate. That is a study of what can be done to improve the lot of the public servant in the field of industrial relations. Members from both sides of the House as well as of the Senate make up the committee.

There were amendments to the Supreme Court Act. I could go on and on. In fact so much progressive legislation passed this House of Commons it would take the whole half hour to read them. There was the Western Grain Stabilization Act.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: Why did that take so long? It was because those across the way could not understand it. It took them months and months to understand finally that it was for the benefit of their constituents. There were amendments to the Law Reform Commission Act as well as the Income Tax Act to help the less fortunate. There was the West Coast Ports Operations Act and the Appropriation Act. There was also the Anti-Inflation Act, which I want to talk about in a few moments. I have no hesitation in talking about that. If this House is not a better House, it is because this is the most inept opposition we have seen in many years.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: If ministers get away with murder, as has been alleged today, it is because of the ineptitude of the people across the way in the question period and in debate. Perhaps the biggest single problem of that party is that they have no leader in the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: When the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) came into the House as Leader of the Opposition, he was here day after day learning his business. The present leader who knows what he should do to weld the opposition as a team rather than divide them is never in the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!