

Adjournment Debate

Further evidence revealed that Lieutenant-Colonel Kenward destroyed evidence and obstructed justice. His punishment: he was promoted.

Yet more evidence showed that Colonel Labbé uttered unlawful commands. His punishment: he was put in charge of the army staff college to teach leadership.

In our parliamentary democracy we have what is called ministerial responsibility. It is the minister's responsibility to know what is going on in his department and to take responsibility for the actions of his subordinates.

I pointed this out to the minister. I said that he must have had these events on file. I asked him why he waited so long to act.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence stood on behalf of the minister. He said that he was disappointed that I would dare to ask a question pertaining to ministerial responsibility. Then he told the House something that all Canadians have known for a long time, that the government was so terribly open it was opaque.

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, seventh edition, opaque means not transmitting light, not transparent, obscure, obtuse and dull witted. I admire the parliamentary secretary's honesty. This is one instance where a member of the government was not obscure. I hope the Liberal whip was easy on him. He has been unforgiving with other Liberal members of Parliament who speak their minds.

Being pleased with the parliamentary secretary's openness, I asked him if the actions revealed that week were considered examples of good leadership. Sadly the parliamentary secretary went back to normal Liberal tactics. His answer was obscure. He said he did not like the tenor of my question and that he personally had called for the Somalia inquiry while in opposition.

This was all fine and good but he failed to answer the question that Canadians demanded to be answered. I then informed the parliamentary secretary that it was the Reform Party that called for an open inquiry. The parliamentary secretary would have been satisfied with a cloudy internal investigation. He did not protest the minister's attempts to make the inquiry opaque.

Canadians are extremely dissatisfied with the mismanagement of the Minister of National Defence. Whether it is the evidence of cover-ups or the procurement of the minister's gold plated pens, Canadians are demanding change. Since our parliamentary system is based on ministerial responsibility, I asked the minister to resign.

At this point the right hon. Prime Minister intervened. He talked about his personal support for our soldiers. This was not just opaque; it was pure balderdash.

The Prime Minister has been in the House for 30 years. Where was he during unification? Where was he in 1969 when the budget reduced the army from 45,000 to 25,000 and the militia from 24,000 to 13,500? Where was he during the civilianization of the armed forces? Where was he when the regimental system was under assault?

He was a senior official in the Trudeau government on the military dismantlement team.

• (1820)

Regarding Lieutenant-Colonel Kenward and Colonel Labbé, the minister had these reports on file with respect to these events. I ask the parliamentary secretary again why the minister waited so long before he acted. Does the minister consider the actions of these senior officials to be examples of good leadership?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very misguided in his attempts to discredit the minister and the government.

Certainly members on this side of the House know that the platform of the third party has been to use specious and irrelevant petty arguments and half truths for partisan gains which really have nothing to do with the Canadian forces and the issue at hand.

Let us look at the facts. It was a Liberal government that called for an inquiry. It was this government that ensured the inquiry would be public and open. At least the hon. member gave me credit for asking for it two and a half years ago.

It was this government that encouraged people to come forward with the information and to go forward to the inquiry. It was this government that ensured that the Somalia inquiry was provided with complete and accurate information and that relevant documents were made available to the commission.

Not all these actions have been easy. We could have been goaded into precipitous action. I will give one example. Where others may have been attempted to score political points, we stayed the course and waited for the Westray Mine decision so that justice would be done and done properly, without the possibility of it being undone later because of a technicality.

That is one example. These actions point toward good leadership, integrity and willingness to get things done. Now is the time for the commission to do its work and we look forward to its recommendations.

The Canadian forces have a long and proud heritage which we are not prepared to throw away, despite the antics from the other side of the House in the third party. I suggest the third party share the sentiment of all members on this side of the House, especially at a time when we have just embarked on a new program, the first in the history of peacekeeping. I hope they will continue to lend their support for Canadian forces abroad.