

Refitting of HMCS "Bonaventure"

Bonaventure. In a sense it is regrettable that committees have to look at matters so long after they occur, so that in the final analysis all they can do is make a little noise about whether moneys were spent properly. If committees were able to examine programs in the course of implementation, they might save the public a great many dollars and cents. The committee's report was presented in a non-partisan way. While I personally regret that the committee saw fit to single out individuals, my great regret is that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury)—who was the minister responsible at that time—did not take steps that would have prevented or precluded a committee of this House finding it necessary to remove from the minister this function of, I suppose you might use the phrase the reward for good, or discipline for indifferent, action. Mr. Speaker, might I call it six o'clock?

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Speaker, at six o'clock this evening many in this chamber were regretting, and members of the public in the galleries were chuckling at, what I can only describe as the blatant arrogance of the President of the Treasury Board, I am sorry he has not reappeared this evening. Before dealing with an amendment which I wish to propose, if the President of the Treasury Board feels he will escape responsibility for the necessity of this motion by acting in a casual and off-handed manner, I suggest he is wrong.

The context of my intervention in the debate on the motion is based in large part on the acceptance of responsibility by ministers of the Crown. I see the minister has come back to us. Perhaps, after all, the government does take the motion seriously, Mr. Speaker, because I see the Government House Leader (Mr. Macdonald) has not left the chamber although I am sure a game of tennis or something like that would have attracted him more. If we are to take a lesson from the President of the Treasury Board—

An hon. Member: You forgot the Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans).

Mr. Forrestall: I think this is his night to be in attendance.

Mr. Kierans: It is the attraction of the speaker that entices me.

Mr. Forrestall: I will pass that remark on to the merry monk. To return to my earlier remarks, Mr. Speaker, I regret that the President of the Treasury Board, in his capacity two or three years ago of Minister of Defence Production, permitted the situation to develop which culminated in a committee of this House viewing the matter so seriously as to name names. Whilst I regret this, the responsibility for the situation must strongly attach to the President of the Treasury Board. I regret equally, as indeed must the people of this country, that the government has not yet concluded an investigation into the procedures followed in the repair of the *Bonaventure*.

• (8:10 p.m.)

It is particularly regrettable, as the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster said, that the minister did not ask for an exhaustive investigation, particularly since there was evidence to show that not only were costs for this contract to go up but there was no way of knowing by how much they would go up. Indeed, when the work began we were told in different ways that the costs would increase, and it must have been evident to the minister that costs were almost out of hand, particularly at the end of the seventh and eighth months of the overhaul program.

Answering the allegations of the motion, the minister this afternoon spoke in a manner that quite frankly I do not find acceptable because he shrugged off his responsibilities on to his colleagues. The President of the Treasury Board smiles. I suggest he is perfectly aware of the serious act of omission he committed, and he will not be able to hide behind the collective responsibilities of his colleagues in cabinet. The tradition that individual ministers were responsible for the acts of their subordinates goes back, if my history is correct, to precedents set in the 1850's and 1860's in Great Britain. At that time, admittedly, a minister could be expected to keep a very close watch on the actions of those who served under him.

This is not the situation today and I do not think that is really what we are talking about. We are not concerned about it today. Circumstances change. Ministers must be as much concerned with events in front of them as with events behind them. We on this side of the House recognize that. But the minister has not changed over the years, as was made