

*Refitting of HMCS "Bonaventure"*

benches at the present time and the people who have sat on those treasury benches by and large ever since 1963.

• (8:50 p.m.)

At this point I should like to pay a tribute to the members of the Public Accounts Committee. I have not been a member of that committee for the last 2½ years, but I was a member before that and for most of the period between 1945 and 1957. The Public Accounts Committee, above all others, is the committee which performs a great service for this Parliament and the people of Canada in examining the accounts of the government. We might say it acts as a brake on excessive expenditures by the administration and things along that line. I believe the Public Accounts Committee has rendered a great service to the people of Canada in presenting its report in this regard. I do not want anyone to think that my ideas are any different in that respect. However, I think the Public Accounts Committee in recommendation No. 6, which appears at the bottom of page 775 of *Votes and Proceedings* for May 13, pointed the finger in the wrong direction. Recommendation No. 6 states:

The committee fails to understand why the Deputy Ministers of National Defence and Defence Production, realizing that the cost of the refit of the *Bonaventure* was, month by month, getting out of control, did not order an "on-the-job" investigation.

The people who should have ordered that investigation were the then Minister of Defence Production, now President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) and the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer) who at that time was Minister of National Defence. They should have ordered the investigation. As a matter of fact, on the basis of my experience of about six years as a cabinet minister I know that none of my deputy ministers at any time could have ordered such an investigation unless I told him to do so.

This is the great difficulty so far as this question is concerned. I know it probably is beyond the bounds of possibility to accept that in this present Parliament the government members on the Public Accounts Committee would agree to a unanimous report which condemned their own ministers. I recognize that this probably is the situation. Nevertheless, this is what the Public Accounts Committee should have done. The Public Accounts Committee at that time should have condemned the then Minister of National

Defence, the then Minister of Defence Production and Industry, and so on, because they were the people responsible for this situation.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Harkness:** If any on-the-spot investigation was to be made, it would have had to be ordered by the ministers. No deputy minister could on his own order an investigation of that kind. It is nonsense to think along such lines. The fact that these investigations did not take place and the costs escalated to the extent they did is the direct responsibility of the minister, now President of the Treasury Board, who at that time was in charge of defence production and industry, and the hon. member for Trinity who at that time was Minister of National Defence.

That is where the responsibility lies, and not on the deputy ministers. I take great exception to an attempt being made to place on deputy ministers and other lesser officials in the Departments of National Defence and Defence Production the blame for the mess in respect of the *Bonaventure*. The people responsible for this situation are the ministers. They should stand up and accept that responsibility. I heard a good deal of the speech the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) read in respect of this matter. I think I have a fairly good idea who prepared it for him, and so on. Perhaps he was speaking for the Minister of National Defence of that time. As a matter of fact, the present Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cadieux) shares some responsibility because while he was not in charge of the department he was the associate minister for a good part of that period. The President of the Privy Council should have said that the ministers of this government are responsible for the mess and that they are sorry for it. Instead of that, ever since the Auditor General's report came out people have been trying to place the responsibility on the deputy ministers and other officials of these two departments.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame!

**Mr. Hees:** Resign!

**Mr. Harkness:** I take a great deal of exception to that. As was pointed out by the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Bell) when this debate was instituted, there is no question about ministerial responsibility in our system. He read some excerpts from Mr. MacGregor Dawson's book. I have some quotations here but I shall not take the time of

[Mr. Harkness.]