

And if it does happen again the minister will, at the least, look foolish and lose caste in the eyes of his Prime Minister, his colleagues and indeed the wider public.

Because of the factors I mentioned, the old, strict rule regarding ministerial responsibility has been diluted. But the Minister of Supply and Services, backed by every one of his colleagues and every member on his side of the House who cheered when he made his statement concerning Larry Stopforth, refused to take even a mini-step and acknowledge that he, as minister, was responsible for what was done and for what the government did. The minister and the government did not have the good grace to do that.

There is another side to ministerial responsibility. The decline is at the heart of the relationship between ministers and public servants. Mr. Speaker, as I have said, ministers take the blame; but they also take the praise. Public servants accept power without publicity. As long as they do not violate the traditional code of their profession, they are shielded from public criticism for their mistakes. That is as it should be and as it should continue to be. I have said previously that incompetence does not have to be tolerated, but that is not the case here. Incompetence has been alleged. The public servant should have the right to answer that allegation, but this government steadfastly refuses to give him that right. Why is it refusing, Mr. Speaker? Is the government worried, afraid that an examination of the case of Larry Stopforth may also lead to an examination of the blunders, foolishness, bad business practices, and so on, relating to the Orion deal? If the government is afraid of this, it ought to say so.

The present position does not do much for Larry Stopforth and every other public servant who finds himself caught in a similar situation. It is to be the lot of public servants in Canada that ministers shall attack them on the floor of the House of Commons?

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Are they to be named on the floor of the House of Commons and left without redress? If that is how the government feels, it is unworthy, not only of the confidence of the people of Canada, which it does not have, but of the confidence of this House. I hope that during this debate some minister of the Crown will stand up and plead the case, publicly, of the public servant who is shunted aside and moved out of his position. Really, Mr. Speaker, that is not the important factor. What is important is this: a public servant who may have served his country in war, served it in peace in the public service of Canada, and advanced in the public service now finds himself named in the House of Commons and subject to ridicule.

● (1620)

He is in danger of losing all that he has, that is not transitory, by its nature—namely, his reputation. What the Minister of Supply and Services did by naming this civil servant was an act of cowardice. The act of the Prime Minister, in not rebuking his Minister of Supply and Services, was an act of complicity in that cowardice. In my judgment and respectful submission to this House of Commons—

Mr. Roy (Timmins): Be honest.

Ministerial Responsibility

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I do not expect the hon. member for Timmins (Mr. Roy) to know very much about ministerial responsibility. Anyway, he will never have to worry about it.

I speak strongly about this matter. I have raised it before in this House of Commons, and I will continue to raise it. If this is going to be the attitude of the government, there is a danger to the public service of this country. Whether we are dealing with Mr. Stopforth or any other public servant, there will be a danger to the integrity of the public service. It could, in fact, lead politicization of the public service—and the public service has suffered enough by the heavy, left-handed methods of this government.

I ask the support of this House of Commons with respect to the individual about whom I have spoken today who has been maligned here and left without remedy. If the hon. member for Timmins thinks that is fair, I do not know where his moral values lie. If there is anything wrong with a public inquiry or parliamentary examination at which Mr. Stopforth would be prepared to put his reputation on the line and suffer the slings and arrows of that disclosure, along with what the government would suffer, I would certainly like to hear it.

I moved this motion because the people of Canada have lost confidence in this government. This House, therefore, ought not to have any confidence in it.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, after the historic half hour that we had in this House just before lunch, anything to be raised during the rest of the day is almost bound to be anti-climactic. Yet even in that kind of atmosphere the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) in his motion has raised a very important issue. Like him, and like other members of the House, I look forward to the reply that will come from the ministerial benches. I notice that most of the ministers have left—all but the two orators, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Mackasey). I do not know which one is going to indulge in a flight of oratory this afternoon.

I suspect—in fact, I believe—that both ministers concur, in the proposition set out in the first part of this motion. I cannot expect either of those two ministers, or any other minister, to concur as I do in the proposition that the government does not have the confidence of this House or the country. However, I trust I am right in assuming that both of the orators sitting in the front ministerial benches agree with us about the importance of the convention of ministerial responsibility. I know my two friends very well. I know their capacity for getting into debate, slaughtering their opponents, and so on. If they cannot do it directly, they do it by beating around the bush and talking about other subjects. I hope they will come to grips with this issue. I see them tossing glances to see which one is going to do it.

This question of the importance of ministerial responsibility is such that whoever speaks for the government ought to affirm it today, even if in so doing he casts some doubt on what was done from a ministerial bench a few weeks ago.