

Services, and in the case of the former Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), who admitted in the House the mess existing in his department. And we have just witnessed a similar case of lack of responsibility on the part of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson) and the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer). But my comments today concern the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien), and I would like to tell him through you how he has in my opinion evaded his own responsibilities.

Among the duties of the President of the Treasury Board is the responsibility to negotiate in good faith with various organized units in the public service: typists, engineers, professional external services agents, filers, researchers, and so on. In this regard, his department, the Treasury Board, has made so many mistakes, has allowed so much injustices that today, in the public service and among the public servants, there is an attitude of frustration, fear, instability and uncertainty for their own future and that of their children.

Mr. Speaker, because of these abuses the public service which is so devoted, loyal and qualified is now becoming a group of people who no longer know where to turn to protect their careers. Those people, those servants of the great Canadian public, are becoming more and more disillusioned. In the past, they carried out their functions and duties with a certainty, a pride and a precision which was admired throughout the world. They were an inspiration, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, it is no longer the case. What we now see are demoralized senior public servants. I would therefore like to give a few examples.

● (1710)

[English]

In the House I asked questions on a number of occasions indicating the areas in which the Treasury Board had not properly fulfilled its function. I do not think I should have to go over them all, but I feel that I should at least cite them and demand some sort of reckoning. The first one I recall, since assuming the responsibilities I have been asked to assume in my party, is one affecting an arbitration award to a group of public fonctionnaires. It was with regard to the forestry and biological sciences group of the Professional Association of the Public Service of Canada. That was a technical professional group which was highly qualified and anxious to do its work, and instead of striking, as it could have done, it opted for the arbitration route. What happened? The dates are here. It was on May 3 that I raised the question. The arbitration award came down and was accepted by the Treasury Board and by this group. If I remember correctly, the award came down just after the Anti-Inflation Board had been put into place.

An arbitration award is just exactly that. It must be recognized as one of the legitimate procedures of the bargaining process. If it is not accepted as an arbitration, we must go to some other method. However, the Treasury Board decided on its own to push aside that arbitration award and refer the matter to the Anti-Inflation Board, and there the award was set aside. I still think that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) ought to have recognized the award which was given by the arbitration tribunal, but he found a means of putting on someone

Ministerial Responsibility

else's shoulders the responsibility for setting aside an award with which he felt he would rather not agree. That was the first instance.

I brought the second instance to the minister's attention and he undertook to look into it.

Incidentally, I mentioned this arbitration award in the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee on May 17 as well. To my knowledge it has not been resolved, and I would be glad if, when the minister gets a chance to consider the procedures today, he can find out just how far this matter has come, recognized his responsibilities and put things back on the rails.

The second matter is one which stems from 18 months ago. I raised the question first in 1975 in one of the committees of which I am a member, and it referred to the disbanding of a group of highly qualified and multi-disciplined public servants who had been brought together into a unit called the Defence Research Board. This group has been disbanded, and the members were told that they would be allocated to other parts of the civil service. That was 18 months or perhaps two years ago, and they are still waiting to find out just what role they play and how they fit into the public service, because their prior employment was part of a separate organization. This is an abdication of the responsibility of the Treasury Board for making sure that these devoted public servants, whose objective in life is to serve the Canadian people, are not cast aside. Their rightful awards are being completely neglected.

Another matter came to my attention earlier this month. There was a group, and this time it was the economists, sociologists, and statisticians who were getting ready for their negotiations, and just prior to submitting their demands, which were negotiable, they received from Treasury Board an indication that the whole group was to be reclassified, and that threw the whole thing into disarray. That is the sort of activity a responsible minister would not allow to happen in his department. I deplore it because of what it is doing to the public service and because the government claims it wishes to respect the principles of collective bargaining.

[Translation]

And finally, this government has so much speeded up the bilingualization program of the civil service that the results could have been expected because there is no doubt that this speeding up policy has compelled many officials to resign or accept a transfer to other jobs for which they are not necessarily qualified.

The speedy application of the policy and the mistakes made consequently have been strongly criticized in the recent report of the Language Commissioner. Before quoting from that report, I would like to provide some clarifications to make you understand my position and that of the Progressive Conservative Party on the application of the bilingualism legislation. I hasten to note that we support the principle on which that legislation is based, that is the Canadian people are entitled to the services provided by federal government in the official language of their choice.

[English]

To be more specific, section 9 of the Official Languages Act, to which we subscribe without any hesitation, reads as follows: