

*Morality in Government*

the government to provide information regarding the conduct of members of parliament; nor is it the right of the R.C.M.P. to divulge such information except to the minister in the cabinet who is responsible for the administration of justice.

To me, the whole matter centres on one simple question: Is the Prime Minister responsible for parliament or is he responsible to parliament? I do not think any Prime Minister is responsible for me. I think I have a responsibility to him as leader of the government of a nation of which this parliament is the most vital part.

• (8:40 p.m.)

I do not think that the Prime Minister can rightfully take upon his shoulders the responsibility for members of parliament because basically, according to the principles of parliament as I understand them, under the traditional parliamentary system in which we operate we are all responsible to parliament. Therefore if situations do arise where the conduct of an hon. member is involved there are other definite, specific channels through which he can move. In this regard you, Mr. Speaker, are one who holds a most vital position, and it is to you that the Prime Minister and all of us must look on matters respecting the conduct of hon. members.

The Prime Minister has today outlined his position with respect to the particular situation in which we find ourselves. He has stated the circumstances as he saw them. He was involved in a situation at the time when he sought the assistance of the commissioner of the R.C.M.P., a situation which I am sure we all would agree was a most difficult one for him. I do not for a moment question his motives in doing what he did.

Because he is the Prime Minister, because he is the leader of the government, I believe it is my responsibility to accept the statement he made, although I cannot agree that in each instance he was warranted in taking the action that he did, nor can I agree that he gave us the explanation as clearly as he might have done. Nevertheless, if we have come to a point in this parliament where we do not and cannot accept the word of the Prime Minister, then indeed we are in a sorry mess.

It is only reasonable to say that the statement he has given is his explanation of why he felt he must do those things was in the best interests of the country. On reflection however, I hope he will see the errors of his action, and make sure that not only does this

[Mr. Thompson.]

mistake not recur but that steps be taken to guard the interests of every member of the house and preserve the rights and privileges of the house.

Having said that, I come back to the issue involved. Yesterday, as I listened to the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Fairweather) presenting the background to the amendment he moved, I could not but agree with what he said. He set a very high level and tone for this debate, based upon what I am convinced was his sincere conviction. But what has happened since then is that we have lost ourselves once again in the constant bickering and in-fighting which has characterized this house for the last three or four years, and which has been responsible for the lowering of the image of parliament and the lack of respect for this house across the country.

Therefore we have to come to the reality of the situation in which we are. At this point it is basically a political one. What we have seen happening today is something that has been most discouraging to hon. members who want to get on with the business they were elected to do. It might be well if an arena could be found somewhere for the leaders of the two main political parties, in which they could go to it, thus allowing the rest of us to get on with the work that has to be done.

To precipitate a crisis in the country at this time will solve nothing. In saying this I could add we do not have respect for either of the two main leaders for the way in which they have faced up to their responsibilities in this house. The stability of parliament and the ability of all of us who make up parliament to get on with the job are things that are our own direct responsibility, and theirs.

I must say that whatever happens in the vote tonight, it is a responsibility of all of us to awaken ourselves to the fact very quickly. Certainly I am not going to be led into some pious crusade for self-righteousness as sought by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle (Mr. Hamilton) as he spoke last night, because I think he dropped this debate into the political doldrums and into the wrangling in which he find ourselves today. So, Mr. Speaker, despite the scandalmongering and character assassination which has characterized this session of parliament, we must be objective tonight and face up to the real issue before the house. We must continue to deplore this type of thing. We believe something better is expected of us. Sir Francis Bacon had something to say about this type of situation. I was reminded of his words by a statement in the press by a