

Ministerial Responsibility

this assurance in writing and to clear the financing of the entire deal before accepting the company's proposal, as he did in a telex message last December 2.

There was further confusion with regard to Treasury Board's authorizing this expenditure. I asked ministers in the House about their knowledge of this transaction, but neither would give me an answer. The Minister of Public Works refused to refer my request to the President of the Treasury Board. I questioned the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) who at that time was on the Treasury Board, but he would not get up to answer.

On June 8 this year I put on the order paper a starred question in which I asked what members of the cabinet were on the Treasury Board on December 2, 1975. The second part of my question reads:

Was the financing of the Lockheed (LRPA) deal discussed at the Treasury Board meeting of December 2, 1975 and, if so, what members of the cabinet were present?

The government does not want to tell the House which members of the cabinet at that time were on the Treasury Board. A starred question is supposed to be answered within a period of two weeks. However, they have chosen not to answer this one. I have severe reservations about this. I doubt whether any members of the cabinet appeared at the December 2 meeting. It was rubber stamped and sent through, and that is why they will not answer my question.

● (2100)

Further, it is now revealed that the Minister of Supply and Services received a document from his deputy minister on December 1 advising that there was some risk with Lockheed financing and warning that the Defence Department could not finance the first year of the project. This evidently demolished the minister's excuse that he did not know on December 2 that the Defence Department was not going to finance the deal by direct payment to Lockheed.

It makes even more contemptible his naming and blaming officials in Defence and his own department. Under our system of government, cabinet ministers are required to shoulder responsibility when things go wrong, not blame underlings.

The Orion mess has delayed by months, if not years, Canada's acquisition of modern patrol aircraft to replace the obsolete Argus. It will waste \$16 million of the taxpayers' money—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the allotted time has expired. He may continue only with unanimous consent. Is there consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the motion although I do it with a bit of a smile on my face because it is another example of the pot calling the kettle black. Listening to free enterprise Tories saying mean things to free enterprise Liberals is amusing, because when it comes right down to the way they operate there is fundamentally no difference between their policies, philosophy, and every-

[Mr. McKenzie.]

thing else. Of course we have always looked with amusement on the pot to my right calling the kettle across the way black. The motion reads:

That this House, finding unacceptable the performance of the Government,—

That is a broad statement. Even I would not be brave enough to say that the entire performance of the government is unacceptable. Some parts of its performance were acceptable. On balance, however, I agree with the motion because there was more that was unacceptable than acceptable.

Before I get into the main part of my remarks I want to refer to something that was said by the Postmaster General (Mr. Mackasey), and repeated by the parliamentary secretary, to the effect that that government and that Liberal party have done the best of any in the world with regard to the rights, support for, and so forth with regard to the public service. If the Postmaster General will check Canadian history, he will find that in typical Liberal fashion they were 20 or 25 years behind.

When the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) was premier of Saskatchewan in 1944, 1945 and 1946, the provincial public service got a union, the right to strike, and a better pension plan. They got rid of all the Liberal hacks in the public service. They had all this plus an independent public service commission 20 years before any Liberal government even came close to thinking about it. The minister can, however, feel proud because he is still 20 years ahead of the Tory party. He can take some satisfaction in that. However, I do not want to hear any nonsense from any Liberal. They had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twentieth century with regard to the public service having the right to organize, the right to strike, an independent public service commission, and a decent pension program. The Liberal party in Saskatchewan and in every other province in Canada had to be dragged kicking and screaming into this. Finally, the federal Liberal government did it. Of course there is no Tory provincial government in the country that has got to it yet.

The minister should only take credit in terms of comparing the Liberals with the Tories. I grant him that they are 20 years ahead of the Tories, although they are 25 years behind the CCF and the NDP.

The motion further states that the House finds unacceptable the government's penchant for shifting blame and, I quote:

—reaffirms its belief in the importance of the convention of ministerial responsibility—

I imagine everyone in the House agrees with that clause. Not even the government members can argue against that. Finally it states:

—and expresses its lack of confidence in the Government.

I want to illustrate the shifting of responsibility or the failure to carry out the responsibility on the part of ministers, particularly the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) who is also in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. That minister still refuses to carry out a vote by producers of the prairie provinces with regard to feed grains being under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board, even though he promised it.