

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Argue: I wonder if I might direct a question to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister say whether the government, in keeping with the statement made in the last session, has discontinued the practice of giving to any member of parliament the right by this means to dismiss any person in the government service, or who operates a post office?

An hon. Member: The bill of rights.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, of this matter I had no knowledge indirectly or at all. I was absent from Canada at the time this event occurred. The hon. member was one of those who referred to that absence on a number of occasions in striking if not spectacular language. There is no necessity for me to establish the fact that I was absent, nor that I had no knowledge whatever of this action. The practice has been outlined and the responsibility is that of the Postmaster General. He has stated that, on his responsibility, as a result of political misconduct or political partisanship—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker:—action was taken. I suggest that the hon. member direct his question to the minister who is responsible, who has taken the responsibility, and who has made it very clear.

Mr. Argue: I believe the Prime Minister misunderstood my question. My question was whether a member of parliament has the right by this means, through any responsible minister, to bring about the dismissal of anybody in the government service or the removal of a postmaster.

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me the hon. member has secured an answer to the specific question, and he is now reaching out into the realm of the hypothetical.

Mr. Argue: The Prime Minister is reversing his own policy of last session.

Mr. Alexis Caron (Hull): I should like to ask the Postmaster General whether, before a dismissal is made, there is an impartial inquiry into the reported case?

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Mr. Speaker, going back, before answering the member's question specifically, into previous history, I might say—

An hon. Member: You could go back to Sir John A. Macdonald.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I request the minister to keep his answer specifically to the question, because it seems to me this point is developing into a debate and that

should not happen during the question period. I hope this will close this discussion.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): My only purpose here is to show the hon. member that this action was strictly in accord with procedure during the period from 1935 to 1940—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace):—when there were 325 dismissed for partisan political activity.

Mr. Speaker: The question, as I understood it, related to the method by which a decision was arrived at in this particular case.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): In this particular case, Mr. Speaker, the procedure adopted was the procedure which had been discussed in the house at the last session and with which members of the opposition, including the hon. member for Laurier, were in agreement. This procedure was followed in this particular case. I might say that this is one of only five dismissals for political activity that have occurred under this government in the Post Office Department, in contrast to the 325 dismissed by the previous regime.

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I should certainly not want the Postmaster General to put words in my mouth which I at no time uttered. In the last session I did discuss the dismissal, the unfair and unjust dismissal, of an officer in the Laurier constituency, but at no time did I admit that the procedure adopted was the one which should have been followed. On the contrary, I condemned that procedure very strongly.

AGRICULTURE

ALLEGED THREAT BY MINISTER TO REDUCE FLOOR PRICES

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Gabriel Roberge (Megantic): I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Agriculture. Would the minister table copies of his speech in which he threatened Canadian farmers with reduced floor prices unless the farmers voluntarily restricted production?

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Minister of Agriculture): I am not sure to which speech the hon. member is referring. I think probably it is the speech I made at the opening of the dominion-provincial agricultural conference, and I shall be glad to table that speech if he wishes it.