

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

A good deal of the information that has been provided to the Auditor General and the RCMP is in my possession, and I think we have many more questions to ask in addition to the questions about financial irregularities. The allegation of financial irregularities is something with which the Auditor General should deal, but what intrigues me and forces me to ask under my responsibility as an MP, is who authorized this whole thing, and where does this trail lead? I cannot see an administration man in Regina signing papers which he suspects and probably knows are fraudulent without having obtained clearance from somebody higher up. This investigation will track down the details at that level.

These are the kind of thing that those of us who should be protecting the public interest should be questioning. Those of us who are fighting against this type of political force being applied should be interested in these matters.

The PFAA has been virtually out of operation for five years during which time it has been winding up its affairs, probably improperly. During that time why was the director paid \$25,000 a year in taxpayers' money, yet not even allowed into his own office? I think that is a question hon. members want answered. Why were three supervisors asked to retire before their terms were up? In one case an individual refused to retire voluntarily before his time, and was fired. He was not fired because of incompetence or for cause. All three of these men were top men, and this one man was let go a year and a half before his pension started. Why were the authorities trying to get rid of these people at the top level?

Mr. Horner: It looks like a cover up.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Why were these field supervisors dismissed? Why were several girls who worked in the PFAA offices dismissed at the end of the year, just at Christmas time? Surely they were not guilty of planning this great conspiracy. Some of these girls had been working in that office for many years. They were appointed by the Liberals. They were kept on by the Conservatives. Why would this government come along when all this fuss began to develop, and dismiss this staff, even before parliament authorized the repeal of this legislation? These are political questions that cannot be investigated fully by the RCMP or the Auditor General.

Before this House decides that this is just a housekeeping bill and should be passed, we should be given a lot of answers. I have also heard reports about bills under the PFAA legislation which have not yet been paid. We have many questions to ask about this sort of thing. There may be no dishonesty involved in this non-payment of bills, but how can we blithely repeal this legislation when we know these matters have not been cleared up properly? These are matters that we should try to clear up under our political responsibility.

Another point of interest is that the money in this fund was collected under this legislation from every farmer, but now that the act will no longer be in operation what is left in the fund will go into the consolidated revenue account in trust. I would like to know who it is being held in trust for, and why—

An hon. Member: For Otto Lang.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Somebody has a Freudian complex behind me. This bill says this money will be held in trust for the western Canada grain stabilization fund. That bill has not even been passed, and if it is passed this program will be a voluntary thing. What moral right has this parliament to take this money that belongs to all those grain farmers that paid it, and put it into a fund where only a few farmers have access to it?

I think I have made enough points to explain why it is that we will be moving a motion asking parliament not to read this legislation a second time, but to refer the subject matter to the standing committee so that it will be taken out of the House to that place where we can ask the proper questions.

● (1610)

Therefore, as I said in my opening remarks, my first thought on seeing the bill was to ask the House leader whether it could be delayed until we have the reports back from the Auditor General and from the fraud squad of the RCMP. I think we have the responsibility, as members of parliament, to see if this money spent under the LIFT program in payment for summer fallow and grass pasture operations was properly spent. Theoretically one could deal with this under the estimates, but the estimates on this are under PFAA which is now off the books. I know that PFAA estimates run until March 31 of 1975 and they are automatically passed through the committee at the end of May, if I understand the rules correctly. We may not have the RCMP report at that time. I think we should keep this bill in limbo until we have the full story because parliament demands that we scrutinize the expenditures of money under this bill.

Let me put it this way. I will tread very lightly on these alleged fraud charges because I think that matter is probably in the hands of the RCMP, but I have many political questions to ask. Forgetting all about the exact amounts of money involved in the frauds, which are criminal offences, there is a political question I should like to put. What were these field men doing during the pre-election period before July 8? Obviously they had done their duty as demanded by their supervisor, and had been paid their expenses. What was the second thing they were doing that brought in expenses of \$1,400 in one report that I saw?

Mr. Benjamin: Counting the grass roots.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): I, and I think other members of parliament, want to ask those supervisors who were fired last fall why they refused to authorize the expenses of those field men, and who authorized the second set of expenses, and why he authorized them.

I want to know who it was that the field men knew whom it was safe for them to phone and bypass their supervisor. Who was it in Regina from whom they received these instructions, and who authorized that official in Regina, because no official in Regina would take a chance on this rip-off unless he had authority from someone higher up?

It is abundantly clear that what we want is to get a chance under the parliamentary rules to ask the political