

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

title, and be classed in the same category as those whose main, if not sole purpose is political. They receive the same remuneration, and no doubt their hours of legitimate work exceed those of the active Liberal party workers. These are the people who are responsible for the situation with which we are now having to deal.

When there is one rotten apple in a barrel, every apple is automatically suspected of taint. The dedicated, non-partisan members of the upper chamber deserve fair treatment. Public servants who have been found responsible for wrongdoing, or who will be so charged in the future, will be dealt with according to the law of our land, even though their efforts to aid the Liberal organization trapped them. Liberals who have been awarded appointments to the other place, and who do such a masterful job of manoeuvring and manipulating for that party, whether to settle a debt or not, do so under the protection of parliamentary rules, and are not faced with either questions, discipline, or punishment.

Any government which does not exercise justice at every level of public service—whether hired, elected or appointed to office—is not worthy of the power entrusted to it by the electors. As is usual, this government operates under the misapprehension that being a Liberal places a person in a secluded dreamland where impropriety, doubt, and the enforcement of justice dare not enter. When that thinking penetrates the public service, the danger point has been reached, and I trust the people of this country will be afforded the opportunity of demanding their rights.

Mr. Frank Hamilton (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Madam Speaker, the problem here is that the PFAA administration has become caught up in the dog fight that has been going on between the Department of Agriculture and the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. I must say this started almost the day that the present minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board was appointed to that position.

I can have some sympathy for what the long time staff of PFAA went through when they were all dismissed this past Christmas because I was caught up in the same sort of situation. I was caught in the dog fight between a minister of agriculture and the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, though I must say it was the previous minister of agriculture. I watched the government place political expediency above the best interests of the western producers one time too many, with the result that we parted company. This was at a time when, in western Canada, we had a four bushel quota at \$1.25 a bushel.

Hon. members opposite have said that western Canadians are considered negative and critical because of their opposition to some government programs. They say we can spend our time much better co-operating with the government. At least that is what the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale) said. The hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) wonders why they let the permanent staff of PFAA go and kept the casual staff. I suggest the answer is because the permanent staff knew a little too much.

[Mr. Towers.]

I have done my best in the past year to try to get some answers to questions posed today by members on this side, but I cannot get to first base. The one per cent levy was suspended on July 31, 1971. In the fiscal year 1972-73 after the act had wound down administratively, the travelling expenses of the PFAA group amounted to \$1,000 per working day. So it is obvious that although they may have been winding down administratively they were certainly winding up politically. It was common knowledge in my area that members of the staff were very active in the last federal election. There is only one way to clear up any question in the minds of a good number of people, and that is to have a full investigation into the whole matter.

The last payments under this act amounting to some \$5 million were made in 1972. In the period from 1939 to 1973 total payments under the act to farmers have amounted to \$397 million. It is interesting to compare this figure, paid over some 34 years, with our grain exports this year. At the present time, compared with the same time two years ago, we are some 140 million bushels short. In other words we are \$500 million short on exports this year compared with two years ago. This represents more than the amount paid out under PFAA between 1939 and 1973.

The PFAA staff were responsible for making payments under the grasslands incentive program and also for handling the LIFT program. Over the years PFAA programs have been operated mainly by the farmers themselves. They were the inspectors and they took information from their neighbours, and this legislation served its purpose well.

All of the goodwill built up over a period of 20 to 25 years has now gone out the window. As I have said, the administration, with few exceptions, was a credit to those involved. Let me go back to an incident that occurred a few years ago which, for political reasons, was blown up out of all proportions. It concerns a former supervisor in PFAA who was subject to an investigation under the act. The former member for Swift Current-Maple Creek had this to say of the commissioner's report:

I would say it is a political report for more than one reason. Maybe the members of the committee do not know this, but I am informed that the judge who presided as commissioner, not in the capacity of judge but as commissioner, was a defeated Liberal candidate in the city of Moose Jaw. Not only that, his counsel, who acted for the government, was a defeated nominee for the candidacy of the Liberal party, and the second lawyer who acted for the government on behalf of the PFAA was a chief fund raiser for the Liberal party in the province of Saskatchewan for a number of years, and was chairman of the finance committee.

That is what this supervisor was up against. At the end of the commissioner's recommendation appears the following:

I recommend that consideration should be given to placing the permanent staff of the Prairie Farm Assistance administration under the civil service of Canada in order to eliminate the possibility of political pressure being exerted on those entrusted with the responsibility of administering the act.

● (1720)

That recommendation was never implemented. Members of this staff who had served for up to 25 years were turned loose. Now we have a so-called group of casual employees, and the expense accounts have gone wild. The last annual report I received shows travelling expenses of \$1,000 a day.