

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

of taxpayers. Why are loyal, competent employees removed from their jobs to protect the guilty, whether at the cabinet level or not? That question has not been answered.

When an individual is hired to work on a specific program or within a department and under that guise that person works for the Liberal party of Canada in a political campaign, at the same time being paid by Canadians' tax dollars, something is drastically wrong. We all know that there could be an error, a wrongdoing or a breaking of rules in anyone's daily job, but the misuse of funds and the underhanded manner in which that person campaigned for the Liberal party while pretending to be doing legitimate work cannot be shrugged off, excused, ignored or pushed under the rug merely because this government thinks it is all right to follow that devious and dishonest policy. Surely someone in this government has a conscience and a feeling of responsibility to those who elected him into office. Surely there is one sincere man of integrity who will stand up and admit that there was wrongdoing, punish the one who was involved, apologize and reveal the facts. That has not been the case. Everyone apparently chose to punish innocent employees to protect the one who sacrificed his name and his integrity to assist the Liberals.

We often hear inside and outside this House that the opposition is wasting time. Why are members of parliament voted into this chamber? Are we not here to protect the electorate against crime, injustice and unnecessary secrecy? If we are not, I am afraid the voters have been given a false impression and, unfortunately, some of them are being represented in a shoddy way. As a last resort I asked for copies of correspondence and other documents related to the PFAA incident, but that attempt was not successful either. The security of this country is not at stake. There is no need for secrecy except to hide the misdemeanours of this government through an employee who is the unfortunate victim. As a member of parliament, and therefore as a protector of those whom I was elected to represent, I have the right to see the RCMP files relating to the PFAA investigation, and I hereby demand to see their contents. I repeat that the security of Canada is not involved. Dishonesty is.

I question whether there was not a violation of the Financial Administration Act, in spite of denials by the former president of the treasury board. How do we know for certain, when we are not permitted to see the evidence? Why the cover-up?

The RCMP decided there was evidence of wrongdoing. The RCMP experienced difficulties, but through their tireless efforts evidence was made available and a preliminary hearing was held on July 17, 1975, when the accused was committed to stand trial on a charge of fraud before a judge and jury. For some reason, the Saskatchewan attorney general's department decided not to proceed further with the matter and a stay of proceedings was entered on December 2, 1975, in the district court judges' criminal court, Regina. How odd, indeed, this should happen when evidence was sufficient to order the accused to stand trial. To add to the unusual, this government chooses to be secretive. If there is nothing to hide, why follow

[Mr. Towers.]

this procedure which can only add to the suspicion, rather than remove it?

Getting back to waste of time—which is a favourite complaint of this government—yes, there has been waste of time. The RCMP spent considerable time performing its duties. The time of this House was used on numerous occasions in an attempt to have this incident treated in an open-minded way. Even the careers of four competent and decent PFAA employees were wasted by forced early retirement or firing. Most of us do not mind using time when it is necessary to reach a worthy goal—in this case, justice—but we do criticize when that time is spent to no avail due to the arrogance, secretiveness, evasiveness and questionable procedures adopted by the ministers under whose jurisdiction the PFAA administration was placed.

Here is a definite example of the daily problem experienced by parliamentarians under this government when it will not divulge information which should be available to the general public. Taxpayers' dollars were used in a political campaign under the cover of a federal government program. If the government persists in saying the employee in question did not do anything illegal, there is no question in my mind that the incident was politically immoral.

I will close my remarks by saying that this government, by this example of devious cover-up, has left its entire administration and every one of its ministers under a cloud. If we cannot trust the government on this one evident misdemeanour, why or how should we be compelled to trust the federal government at any time on any issue? Anyone can cower, cringe, hide and be evasive. It takes a man to stand up to say he was wrong.

Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) for giving me the opportunity today not only to review this specific case but also to discuss the very important general issue of availability of information. I know that he and other hon. members of the House will understand if I refer directly to my notes sometimes because this is a rather technical subject. The hon. member has asked that an order do issue for a copy of the contents of the file or files in the possession of the Department of the Solicitor General and/or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police relating to the investigation concerning the Prairie Farm Assistance Act administration. Production of the files has been denied for the reasons recorded in answer to the notice of motion on February 23, 1977. The hon. member refused to withdraw his motion and, Mr. Speaker, transferred the matter for debate.

It behooves me, therefore, to elaborate upon the reasons for the denial already stated. Historically, the question of the release of information to hon. members in order to enable them to secure factual information about the operations of government, to carry out their parliamentary duties, has been balanced against the equally important need to protect the security of the state and the rights to privacy of its citizens. When, in the judgment of the government, the need for production is outweighed by the need to protect security or