

Veterans Affairs

material, but I can only reply with the question: Why has the Government of Canada not asked for such permission from the government of Prince Edward Island? The inevitable answer is that the Government of Canada just does not want these papers to become public because it would probably reveal a staggering tale of political patronage that would not be pleasant for the Canadian people to see.

It seems most strange to me that a government which speaks of increasing freedom of information continually gives examples of restricting information, and this is certainly the case when the government turns down the release of the various documents on this particular matter. One can only conclude that the present administration in actual fact only pays lip service to the principle of freedom of information, and if it were not so, the Minister of Veterans Affairs or someone speaking on his behalf would rise in this House today and say that the government has talked this over, has changed its mind and will release the necessary papers.

Yet another factor that seems to have received practically no consideration is the fact that this country has two official languages. By law, Canadians must be served in the language of their choice. It is obvious that French is not the language of Prince Edward Island. Therefore, to stay within the law created by the government, we would obviously have to import to Prince Edward Island bilingual people to render the services that would be needed by Canadians in provinces such as Quebec and certain other parts of Canada. What benefit is that to decreasing unemployment in Prince Edward Island?

I have already touched several times on what is obvious political motivation behind the move to Prince Edward Island and for a moment I would like to enlarge on this. It seems to me to be utterly incredible that a government is willing to put first a political favour to the Minister of Veterans Affairs rather than to put first the veterans of this country who suffer everything from shattered bodies, blindness, mental anguish and, in so many cases, permanent disablements because they stood up for Canada when they were needed. For it to come down at this time to a decision based on the political welfare of a few individuals rather than on the welfare of those who need and deserve the best of service and consideration constitutes an unbelievable chapter in the history of political manipulation.

If this government were truly interested, as it says it is, in promoting the economy of Prince Edward Island and other sections of the country, then why does it not do so by coming up with policies that will assist various provinces, rather than policies that will assist various Liberal cabinet ministers?

Without much difficulty, this government put up millions and millions to bail out the Chrysler Corporation and just recently more millions of dollars to Michelin Tire in a declared attempt to help the unemployment situation of this country. In the case of the Department of Veterans Affairs, they would throw \$30 million to \$40 million down the drain that in the long run will not be of help to anyone.

I believe it is essential for the government to produce the papers for public view in regard to the Prince Edward Island move, and I am sure it would help result in putting an end to

any further—I hate to use the word—bribery to other sections of the country to assist members of the Liberal cabinet who are either in danger of electoral defeat or who have some foolish notion that they deserve a personal favour from the government for the services they have rendered here in Ottawa.

I have touched on what I believe to be the main reasons that the Department of Veterans Affairs should not be moved to Prince Edward Island and why the government should make public the various documents and correspondence which led to this most unfortunate decision. In summing up, I can only say that there is no excuse for spending millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars without a beneficial purpose to the taxpayer. There is no point creating a situation where service to the veterans of Canada is even worse than it is now, and above all, there is no point whatsoever in this House condoning the shuffling around of government departments, not on the basis of sound judgment but entirely on the basis of resulting benefits for members of the Prime Minister's entourage of cabinet colleagues.

I hope the government will see fit to reverse its decision and allow these documents to be made public so that we can all judge for ourselves. If I am wrong in what I have said, and others are wrong in what they believe—that this was simply a political move in the first place—I am sure we will all readily admit it. However, as yet I have not heard anything by the government to indicate in any way whatsoever that they have valid, justifiable reasons, other than political reasons, for the move that was announced several years ago and is still being carried on today, probably soon unfortunately to reach the point of no return. I hope the government will stop before it goes that far.

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Mississauga North): Mr. Speaker, I support the move to Charlottetown.

I would like to take a few moments now to speak about some of the benefits and particularly some of our preparations for the relocation of the headquarters of veterans affairs to Charlottetown. Every effort has been made at every stage to make this relocation as smooth as possible. The planning has been designed to accomplish the move to Charlottetown without affecting the quality of service and at the same time avoiding serious disruptive effects on the people of Charlottetown.

The relocation is already well under way. Plans call for a phased relocation spread out over several years. There are now 50 veterans affairs employees operating in Charlottetown. Included in this group are 11 war veterans allowance board employees who will soon be joined by the other board employees. This is a milestone in the relocation program. This board will be the first complete unit relocated to the island. By September, 1980 a total of 160 jobs will have relocated to Charlottetown and an additional 30 will have relocated by September, 1981. The remainder of the portfolio will relocate in 1982-83.