

Supply—Agriculture

Mr. Chevrier: A fair kind of investigation that was.

Mr. Harkness: As far as I and the senior officials of my department are concerned, we consider it a very serious matter when a man engages in conduct of this kind. It brings the entire inspection service into disrepute and under suspicion and it is the type of thing which cannot be allowed to continue.

The hon. member for Laurier was trying to make it appear that we had known about this matter months back and did not take any action in connection with it. That is not the fact. The first time any information in regard to this man or his political activities or other activities came to my attention or that of my officials in Ottawa was May 1, 1958. That was the first intimation of any kind we had in this connection and it was as a result of the complaints we received at that time that I ordered an investigation made. The various facts I have already given to the house in connection with this man came to light and I finally ordered his release on May 29.

Mr. Chevrier: Would the minister permit a question?

Mr. Harkness: Which is about a full month later. Yes, I will answer a question.

Mr. Chevrier: Was this man given an opportunity to appear and defend himself?

Mr. Harkness: There was no opportunity to appear and defend himself, no.

Mr. Pickersgill: A fine investigation.

Mr. Harkness: As a matter of fact by his own admission he received this contraband which was forfeited. He admitted buying the cigarettes and that he received the contraband liquor as gifts from the people on the ships which he was supposed to be inspecting. Hon. members can draw their own conclusions as to why he was getting gifts from these people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: Fine justice.

Mr. Harkness: But if the information that this man had received contraband which had been obtained from these ships, and had been found in possession of it had come to my attention and the attention of my departmental officials at the end of November or when the events took place or at any time after that within two or three weeks or even one month—the hon. member for Laurier mentioned something about a date in December—then this man would have been dismissed forthwith and that would have been the end of the matter. He would then

have been available for full-time duties in helping the hon. member to organize in the election campaign.

An hon. Member: He needed lots of help.

Mr. Harkness: In regard to the question which was raised in so far as the prosecution of this man is concerned, the customs department apparently decided not to bring him into the police court for prosecution because it had no evidence that he was selling this liquor.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Harkness: All right; I am so informed by the Minister of National Revenue.

Mr. Chevrier: You had better read the sections of the act.

Mr. Harkness: All right, in any event the prosecution branch of the customs department decided not to prosecute because of that fact.

Mr. Pearson: They had no case.

Mr. Harkness: They certainly had a case—they found liquor in this man's possession. He admitted where he got it and as a matter of fact he said he bought the cigarettes—he did not get them as gifts—but he admitted he got them from the ships and admitted that the liquor was given to him. As I say, however, they did not prosecute him, which happens in a large number of cases, according to my information.

Mr. Chevrier: When it is not serious.

Mr. Harkness: In any event, had the matter been drawn to our attention, as I have said, he would have been discharged forthwith.

The hon. member for Laurier said that I mentioned I did not like questions being asked, but I do not know where he can find any statement of mine along those lines. I do not mind any questions being asked—

Mr. Pickersgill: Except by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate.

Mr. Ricard: You flatter yourself.

Mr. Harkness: The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate said it, I did not say it. I do not mind questions being asked but I do deplore the amount of time which is being taken up over a matter of this kind which I think the hon. member, as well as everyone else here, realizes is not a very important matter. I think if everyone in the house looks at this thing in any sort of a fair way he will agree that there was every excuse and every reason in the world for getting rid of this man. He was not the type of man one should have engaged on an inspection job in one's department.