

Supply—Agriculture

minister has done about the letter, which was sent to him, a copy being forwarded to me. The letter is as follows:

Dear Sirs,

It has recently come to our notice that the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, has called for tenders to supply a one ton truck to the experimental farm at this point.

We understand that some 12 to 14 dealer names were listed for tender, but only one dealer in Indian Head, namely Campbell Sales and Service, was given the opportunity to tender.

General Motors Sales manager phoned us today, asking why we were not required to submit a tender, and the only answer we could give was that Campbell, a practically new dealer here, was a very active supporter of the Liberal party.

We have been motor dealers in this town and district for the past 47 years. Our pay roll supports a staff of seven employees and their families, averaging 16 years continuous employment. We have not required any employee to claim unemployment insurance benefits by reason of lay off in the trend of our business, and this is the first time in our recollection that discrimination has been shown in the matter of who shall, or who shall not, be privileged to tender on purchases for the government farms at Indian Head.

Yours very truly,

Nichols Garage.

Per D. L. Nichols.

My request here, Mr. Chairman, is simple. We are very anxious in this committee to make certain that the Department of Agriculture is not used to dispense patronage. There is so much trouble in many areas of farm economy that this cannot be tolerated. I am sure the minister joins me in this opinion. I have heard enough to know that he has been resisting these pressures, and I want him to know that we are backing him in this resistance. This is a case which I am sure is very small, but it does indicate that in an area where villages are small and there are not enough people in and around them to do any more than barely to keep alive merchants, car dealers, and so on, under no circumstances can the politics of a particular company influence such transactions as I mentioned. I happen to know that with this particular company its politics are one way one election and another way the next. Therefore I suggest that great care be taken to see that in the rare cases when a truck or car is to go up for tender for an experimental farm in an area such as this, all the merchants in the town are given a chance to bid. Usually, of course, the lowest tenderer wins. But in view of the statement which the minister has just made I should like to ask him whether he has dealt with this letter which was sent to him on April 22 and how he has dealt with it.

Mr. Hays: Mr. Chairman, I have a faint recollection of this letter. I will look into the matter but if I recall correctly the statement is not exactly correct in that a number of people tendered on this particular truck and the lowest tender received the business.

To get back to the other question, I certainly believe that the government of Canada and all governments as a matter of fact would be better off if they did not deal with patronage. Nevertheless, we all know that this has been going on for years. I think the time has come when responsible people should realize that we are working for the people of Canada, that everything should be based on merit and that we just do not need to do these things to have good government.

I am a little surprised, however, that the hon. member would raise this question. When I became Minister of Agriculture I may have got off to a fairly slow start but I can tell the hon. member I am going to end up with a pretty good department, and the farmers will say the same thing. On the 10th day of June, 1957, the Progressive Conservative government was elected and on the 21st day of June they took office. I think the hon. member should know that my investigations have revealed that action was taken 35 days later which resulted in 72 lawyers from coast to coast in Canada receiving no more farm loan board work. I found the same situation through my department.

I have seen several personal and confidential letters, but I will not table them in the House of Commons because if I have to be a member of parliament under those circumstances I do not want to be here. I do not think this should be done. I can assure the hon. member that we are working for the Canadian farmer. This is one of the reasons why we called in all the branch managers of the Farm Credit Corporation and explained to them that we were going to cut 10 days off the time it takes to service loans, 48 to 38 days. I think we have to do this. I agree with the hon. member for Qu'Appelle that the sooner we get the business of government on this sort of basis the better it will be for everybody in Canada.

Mr. Hamilton: I should like to follow this point a little further. Did I understand the minister to say that when he took office he found there had been dismissals of lawyers doing farm loan board work? Is he not aware that there was a change from the farm loan board to the Farm Credit Corporation? If he is prepared to enlarge on this situation, is he not prepared to say what has taken place