

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 3, 1963

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. HAYS—DISMISSAL OF P.F.A.A. SUPERVISOR

Hon. Harry W. Hays (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. On Thursday last, November 28, the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. McIntosh) addressed a question to me which he had directed to the Acting Prime Minister in my absence on Tuesday, November 26, regarding a statement I had made in Edmonton to the effect that I appointed people according to merit.

He then went on to say that if it is government policy that personnel are selected on merit, why was it, in view of this statement by myself, that Mr. George Walker, the former P.F.A.A. supervisor for Swift Current, was discharged from the government service, and went on to say that either my statement was false or I did not practice what I preached.

My reply to the hon. member indicated that my statement was not false and that I do practice what I preach. This man was discharged on the recommendation of the director because he did not perform his duties satisfactorily. I also pointed out that the director had been appointed by the previous administration on June 1, 1961, and he is a good man.

The hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek then stated that he understood I would find in the files a report made by the present director in regard to this man, to the effect that he was the most capable supervisor in that branch, and asked if I did find this report would I consider firing the director and reinstating the supervisor. In reply to this question I may say that I have had the files searched, and am advised that Mr. Walker was employed as a part time inspector under the P.F.A.A. for varying periods each year from September 4, 1957 to December 5, 1962, when he was appointed district supervisor for the Swift Current area on a full time basis. However, there is no report in the files to the effect that he was the most capable supervisor in the branch, as stated by the hon. member.

At the time the hon. gentleman asked the question I stated that apparently he did not

understand that the problem apparently arose out of the fact that Mr. Walker was taking orders from the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek instead of from the director, and this was one of the problems, and that he was not satisfactorily filling his job.

The basis for the dismissal of Mr. Walker was a report received from the director of the prairie farm assistance administration to the effect that for some time the matter of continuing the services of Mr. George Walker as supervisor for the Swift Current area had been a problem to him. The administration of the P.F.A.A. in the Swift Current area was most unsatisfactory and, all in all, a situation had developed where there was a lack of any co-ordination between the Swift Current office and head office in Regina. The supervisor was simply not carrying out the director's instructions. His utter lack of co-operation with the Regina office was one fault, and his disregard for the director and Mr. W. F. Davies, the superintendent, could not be overlooked.

Although he was quite conversant with the operations of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act from experience gained as office manager for his predecessor, he made no effort to check inspectors who were not properly carrying out their duties when taking cultivated acreage reports from farmers in the area. In a number of instances he failed to carry out the inspections of those townships which were contiguous to other townships which had been declared eligible for award by the board of review. This is one phase of the administration that is quite necessary, and it is insisted that each supervisor complete the inspection of such townships.

He was explicitly instructed not to endeavour to answer any correspondence with officials of rural municipalities or farmers in his area, but rather that all such correspondence be directed to the Regina office, where files are kept for reply. He disregarded instructions in this matter. He refused to co-operate in the investigations of alleged irregularities in some cultivated acreage reports which were filed in his area for awards. A situation developed in the area under his supervision which the director felt required a recheck of certain townships, but he received no co-operation whatsoever from Mr. Walker in making these rechecks. Had