

Supply—Agriculture

This statement comes many months after it is alleged by the minister that Mr. Mitchell was found in possession of contraband liquor. Surely the official, his own official, must have known about this alleged offence and he could not have considered it serious when he, in the face of these facts, gave the statement which I have put on the record.

Then from a higher official of the Department of Agriculture, namely Dr. G. T. Labelle, regional veterinarian for the city of Montreal, comes this statement which is in French and which I shall read and translate. It is dated June 19, 1958:

A Qui de droit.

Ceci est pour attester que Monsieur Walter Mitchell, durant son emploi à notre Ministère comme Vérificateur et Fumigateur, a toujours été ponctuel et assidu à son travail. Nous n'avons aucun reproche à lui adresser concernant l'accomplissement de ses devoirs.

This statement translated in my best English is as follows:

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that Mr. Walter Mitchell during his employment in our department as a checker and fumigator was always punctual and assiduous at his work. We have no blame or reproach to attach to him concerning the accomplishment of his duties.

This is dated June 19, many months—in facts five or six months—after this alleged offence. Furthermore, notwithstanding that the minister said on two occasions that this man had been guilty of an offence on November 29, 1957, he was called back to work in April, 1958. If this charge was so serious and if it had not been abandoned, as I am informed, why was he called back to work? I have put on the record what the facts are.

I say to the minister that he has dealt unfairly and unjustly with this man. I say furthermore that he has maligned this man's reputation by putting on the record a statement which is certainly not in accordance with what he said the other day and with the facts. He has clearly left himself open also to an action for defamation of character if made outside the house. He has dismissed a person who was in the employ of his department for 22 years, and he refuses to produce the evidence. He says he has affidavits and photographs, but he does not want to give them to the house. He guarantees that the facts are accurate, but he will not tell us on what he bases his judgment. He says he decided not to prosecute because he did not want to give the case any publicity.

May I say that the case was not one in his department. The case came from another department, if there was a case; and there was no prosecution. The minister had nothing to do with the matter in so far as the other department was concerned.

The minister said he knew about this case only two or three months before July 23, which was when he spoke. If he knew about it only then, how could he refuse to prosecute as he said he did? Then of course he went on to say that he did not like the questions that were being asked. He decided this matter without inquiry and without investigation. When a man makes his livelihood by means of a position such as the one held by this man, and when he has been discharging his duty over the years—for 22 years in this case—without the slightest complaint and with the strongest recommendations even after the alleged infraction, I say that his reputation is at stake when action of the kind taken by the minister has been taken.

The decision of the minister was taken ex parte. I say again that he has committed a grave injustice to Walter Mitchell, particularly as this action comes from a minister of a government pledged to bring down a bill on civil rights by which the rights of the individual are to be protected. The rights of the individual in this case are clearly established by the record and the practice and procedure over the years in this house. That practice has not been followed. Someone in the department, evidently of a different political faith from that of Mr. Mitchell, has reported against him.

While it was the minister's prerogative to accept the report and consider it, I say that he should not have acted upon it (1) without getting a certificate from a member of parliament or (2) without conducting an investigation. An investigation was not conducted. The minister proceeded without an inquiry. I submit that his action is contrary to the practice; the rules of this house and contrary to justice. In the name of justice I demand that an investigation be now held into this case by an impartial tribunal.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, the initial complaint of the hon. member for Laurier I think characterizes the entire long speech he has made in this matter. He complained because, as he says, there had been failure to produce documents yesterday in connection with this case. There is no man in this house who knows better than does the hon. member for Laurier that documents of the kind he asked for have never been produced in this house.

Mr. Pearson: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pickersgill: That is utterly untrue.

Mr. Harkness: In speaking to this matter yesterday I outlined the three types of documents which I said constituted most of the file in connection with this case. I then went on to say that documents of that type—