

Statement by the Prime Minister
concerning problems of personnel security

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The honourable member for York West spoke in the debate on the address on Wednesday (November 28) on a matter that is of general concern about which I think hon. members might wish to have a statement from the government. It has to do with the problem of safeguarding secret information in industries engaged on defence production.

The hon. member referred to the case of a Mr. George R. Jackson who was recently released from employment by the A.V. Roe Co. Mr. Jackson's case is currently being reviewed and I do not intend to deal with it now. It is the general problem about which I wish to say something.

I think the hon. member for York West has done a service in bringing this matter forward in the serious way he did. The government has to deal with a lot of difficult and unpleasant problems in the conditions of to-day and of these one of the most difficult, and certainly one of the most unpleasant, is trying to assess the reliability of people who deal or may have to deal with vital defence matters.

As a part of our defence programme, contracts have to be placed for the production of various types of equipment, and in many cases this involves the use of details of a highly secret character; secrets which in many cases belong as much to other governments as to our own. Now there are people both

in this country and outside who are very anxious to obtain such secrets and who are making constant efforts to find out as much about them as they can. It is, accordingly, vital that no risks be taken which can be reasonably avoided with the security of such defence items. The government is responsible for protecting their secrecy in so far as this country is concerned.

For that reason, any company entering into a contract for the production of defence equipment in Canada must agree that it will exclude from access to secret material any persons about whose reliability the government has any serious doubt. This means that in cases where an individual's background, particularly any associations with Communist or pro-Communist organizations, or his present associations or even, in some cases, some instability or other qualities of character raise doubts as to the security of secret matters placed in his hands, then that person must not be allowed access to any secret or vital defence items. It is not possible to give the individual the benefit of the doubt. Reliability for security is not the sort of thing about which conclusive proof one way or the other is usually possible. Sometimes it is, but more often it is a matter of judgment based on all the information that is available. Where the national security is involved, the government simply cannot take the position

that defence secrets are to be available to everyone against whom a cut and dried case cannot be made.

The reliability of the overwhelming majority of industrial employees in Canada is beyond doubt. In the case of the few who cannot be said with certainty to be reliable, the government has always to consider two things: the need to avoid doing any injury to an individual and the protection of material vital to the security of this country.

In cases where it is considered that the security of secret material might be endangered by giving a particular individual access to it, the company employing him is informed that such access cannot be allowed. The company is not instructed to dismiss him. Neither the Department of Defence Production nor any other agency of the government has instructed a company to dismiss an employee for security reasons. A decision that a person should not be entrusted with secret information is not a decision that he is disloyal, and it does not mean that he should be dismissed. It simply means what I have said - that he should not have access to secret information.

There are usually positions in a plant that do not involve security, and transfers to them can be made. It may happen that in some plants which are engaged wholly on defence work such transfers are impossible, for one reason or another. In those cases the company is faced with the choice of releasing

the individual or giving up its contract. These are the most difficult cases to handle. It may be that in all instances companies have not done their utmost to find means of making transfers. The importance of always doing so is being brought to their attention. Employers should always try to avoid dismissals if at all possible. They have a duty not to increase the difficulties or disabilities of persons whose only misfortune is that their reliability is open to question. It is very important that such persons should not be branded as disloyal.

What I want to make clear, however, is that the decision of the government is solely whether it can or cannot risk the security of some vital matter by allowing a particular person to have access to it. It is up to the employing company to decide what to do about the particular employees who cannot be allowed access to the secret material.

I have dealt thus far with the nature of the problem and the character of the task that the government attempts to perform in protecting the security of defence production. The procedure in handling the matter is also a problem.

The hon. member for York West suggested, as others commenting on this matter have suggested, that there should be a board or panel to hear representations from individuals before decisions are taken as to their reliability for security. This suggestion appeals to most fair-minded people because it seems

to accord with the general principles on which we proceed in dealing with charges or claims against a man in criminal or civil law and in other instances. There are, however, particular considerations that have to be weighed on the other side.

In the first place, the assessment of the reliability of a person does not necessarily, or even usually, involve anything that could be regarded as "charges" against him. Decisions on reliability are taken every day in the public service and, indeed, in business and in almost every sort of organization. Most honourable members will at one time or another have been in a position where they have to decide whether they could or could not rely on a particular person in some important matter.

The only thing that distinguishes the cases I am talking about is that in defence production, and more particularly in the development stage of defence production, some methods and processes are of enormous importance and their betrayal could do injury to the whole nation. Reliability is more critically important than in most other circumstances. The question at issue is not guilt or innocence of some particular charge. The sole question is whether a certain person can or cannot be entrusted with secret defence material. It would give a completely false atmosphere to the matter if it were assumed that reliability can somehow be put beyond doubt by meeting formal charges - or indeed, that reliability cannot be brought into doubt except

on the basis of formal charges. Assessment of character may be the only consideration in some instances. That is not a matter of charges, or of trial or of proof. It is a matter of judgment.

A second consideration to be borne in mind is that in dealing with reliability in defence production we are not in the realm of what have come to be called "human rights" and "fundamental freedoms". There is no human right or fundamental freedom involved. No person has a right of access to secret defence items, and no man's freedom is infringed when he is denied such access. In a particular case a company may decide that it has no place where it can employ a man who cannot be given access to defence matters. In such a case the man's job becomes involved. Where that is so, it is always possible for a company to ask that a case be reviewed to see if the decision cannot be reversed and the government is always ready to make such a review. But in the last analysis, the question for the government and the question it must decide is whether it is or is not satisfied that there would be no risk to the security of some secret material or process by letting a certain person have access to it. No outside panel or board can take that responsibility. No matter how much the government might like to be relieved of this very unpleasant duty no government would have the right to shift to others the responsibility for the security of our defence secrets.

There is a further consideration of an entirely different order that is also relevant. It is that hearings could and probably would compromise our general security precautions. Some of the people about whose access to secret material we have to be most concerned operate in the interests of an organization that is skilfully and tightly bound together. This organization acts with a ruthlessness and a readiness to sacrifice its own followers, which we find it almost impossible to appreciate. It is only by careful, long continued and patient work that means have been established by our police forces of getting information about the operations of this organization. The organization would be more than ready to precipitate hearings involving their own followers, even if it meant the personal ruin of those individuals, if the hearings would lay bare the sources of information that the police have established. If hearings were held, the information as to the background or other considerations causing doubt about an individual would have to be revealed. I do not see how a "hearing" could be regarded as serving any purpose if they were not. More than that, it would be argued that the validity of such information or the grounds for doubt could not be assessed nor could any "charges" be properly refuted unless the kind and sources of information were disclosed, the informants questioned, and so forth. If that were done in even two or three instances, they might be sufficient to nullify, in

very short order, such security defences as we have been able to build up after years of painstaking effort. The well-organized opponents of our way of life would be more than ready to sacrifice a good many of their supporters to gain the kind of information that hearings would inevitably reveal.

For the reasons I have given the government has thus far taken the view that no one has a valid claim to be given a hearing before he is denied access to secret defence material or processes of defence production. It has considered that a system of hearings should not be instituted. This means, of course, that the responsibility of the government is the greater to see that every case is carefully assessed and that no decisions as to the reliability of an individual are lightly taken. They are not lightly taken. Moreover, the cases can always be re-examined and the government will have no reluctance about reversing an original decision if further review suggests that it can safely be reversed. This whole matter is, however, distorted and seen in a false light, if it is confused with loyalty and thought of in terms of specific, provable or disprovable charges. You can doubt the reliability of a man for the security of some vital defence matter without considering him to be disloyal. You can continue to doubt no matter how much he argues or protests.

The problem that is thrust on the government of assessing the reliability of employees in defence industries, and

occasionally of deciding in some case that reliability is uncertain, is not a pleasant one. In the present state of things it is, however, an unavoidable one. It is the government itself which is and must be answerable for the security of our defence secrets. The government is, however, fully aware of the importance of ensuring in so far as possible that no injury is done to any individual through the decisions that must be taken. Security procedures are constantly under review and if they can be improved, the government will always be ready to make the improvements and will always welcome and seriously consider constructive suggestions to that end.

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