

# Arrogance substituted for accountability

BY MURRAY MANDRYK, THE LEADER-POST MAY 7, 2010

It's a little rich for Dwain Lingenfelter -- the one-time NDP minister who brought us Spudco and Channel Lake and the politician whose name is most linked to the current scandal involving forgery of NDP party memberships -- to be talking about a "culture of deceit" in the Saskatchewan Party government.

Sooner or later, all governments fall into the trap of deception. Whether it's viewing consultation as an irritant or stretching the truth into something unrecognizable, it's somewhat the nature of government to become deceitful.

And lest Lingenfelter and his New Democrats believe that Premier Brad Wall's government has reached that point particularly early, let us remind them the NDP government's first major order of business was ripping up the Gross Revenue Insurance Program (GRIP) contracts with farmers within its first few months in office.

This, too, might once have been categorized as a "culture of deceit." But notwithstanding the NDP's hypocrisy here, there is something about today's Saskatchewan Party government that does suggest it is losing its way. This is more than a government having the occasional bad day, which Thursday truly was. This is a government that's become so arrogantly unaccountable that it can't see right now what it's doing wrong.

On Thursday, we saw Environment Minister Nancy Heppner sashay into the legislature at her own leisure. (After all, why should a minister bother to show up on time for question period?) She then blew off reporters' requests for interviews afterwards as if she was back in Ottawa working for Stephen Harper. She's recently demonstrated less understanding and has been less of an advocate for her department than any other minister.

We then saw a petulant Health Minister Don McMorris -- obviously still stinging from the previous day's apology in the assembly -- trying to justify why a Prince Albert man should have to pay for dental surgery after the removal of a matchbook-sized tumour in his jaw. Isn't this the "accountable" government that promised us a health ombudsman and a "patient-first review" so such patients wouldn't fall between the cracks? But in fairness, the Sask. Party government has been distracted by more pressing issues of the day, like removing the plaque in the legislature commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Tommy Douglas government election.

And where was Premier Brad Wall Thursday? Well, House business was somehow less important than being in Saskatoon that afternoon to unveil a podium for the handicapped (I kid you not) similar to one he unveiled in Regina months before.

Frankly, the government's biggest problem may be Wall himself. He appears to be losing his sense of humility -- once, his greatest asset.

Wednesday, we heard Wall's bizarre defence that because the government held public meetings on the nuclear file last year (an issue on which it would have been impossible to avoid public consultation), it has therefore consulted more than any other government. Really, sir? What about your essential services legislation you once deemed unnecessary? What about changes to the Construction Trades Act you told the Building Trades Council in 2006 wouldn't be touched? What about the Wildlife Habitat Protection Act on which you didn't consult the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation? The winding down of SCN where your ministers didn't even bother to meet with the board? Breaking your promise on municipal funding without even informing municipal leaders? And you claim a lack of consultation hasn't been an issue? Truth be told, Wall now appears to think a 30-point lead over the NDP gives him the right to behave like an Alberta Tory. Sadly, most everyone else in this Sask. Party government takes their lead from Wall.

This isn't a culture of deceit, but it's a growing culture of arrogance. Contrary to Wall's sanctimonious notion Wednesday, this government isn't darn near perfect when it comes to accountability and transparency. It has a hell of a long way to go.

Accountability and transparency should be more than bygone campaign rhetoric. They should be the foundation of government culture.

Right now, that culture does not exist in the Sask. Party government.

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