

Fry pressured to apologize and resign

The Canadian Alliance and NDP push for her ouster, saying the Vancouver Centre MP 'fabricated' stories of cross burnings across B.C.

By PETER O'NEIL

OTTAWA — Hedy Fry, the secretary of state for multiculturalism, was told Friday she should apologize to residents of Kamloops which, like Prince George, has been smeared with the allegation of cross-burning by the minister responsible for fighting racism.

Fry (Vancouver Centre), who infuriated Prince George residents this week by falsely alleging that racists were burning crosses there "as we speak," made a similar unfounded allegation in 1997 about another part of the B.C. Interior.

"It disturbs me that in rural B.C., crosses are burned outside Kamloops," she told the *Edmonton Journal*.

Fry, who was appointed to the junior cabinet position a year earlier, cited cross-burning in that 1997 interview in which she argued that there had been a rise in activity involving hate groups like the Heritage Front.

"I don't know the answer of

why B.C., why Alberta," she said. A spokeswoman for the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce said Friday that Fry's comments were not substantiated at the time, while Mayor Mel Rothenburger said he had never heard of such an incident.

Rothenburger, who was editor of the *Kamloops Daily News* at the time and said he would have been aware of such activities, said the minister may have mixed up her regions.

"If the minister at any time has suggested that Kamloops is a community in which cross-burning has occurred or is a community that tolerates cross-burning, then she owes an apology to Kamloops."

Fry, meanwhile, flew to Iqaluit, Nunavut, to speak about racial intolerance Friday and didn't return phone calls for the second day in a row despite telling *The Vancouver Sun* Thursday she would provide an interview.

The Canadian Alliance, which continued Friday to call for Fry's firing or resignation, said her

frequent reference to such an inflammatory activity reflects a clear and long-standing contempt for rural Canada and rural Canadians.



HEDY FRY

age of homosexual constituents of any riding in Canada.

"Everything is fine there but the rest of Canada is all prejudiced and against everybody."

Reynolds (West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast) said Fry's alle-

"She has a prejudice against anything outside Vancouver Centre," said Alliance whip John Reynolds of Fry's riding, which is said to have the highest percent-

gations are part of a campaign to smear the Alliance as an intolerant party, since it represents all of rural B.C. and Alberta.

New Democratic Party MP Svend Robinson accused Fry in the Commons of blatant dishonesty and said Prime Minister Jean Chretien has no ethical standards if he thinks her behaviour doesn't constitute a firing offence.

"Can a minister slander the community of Prince George, a community that has won awards for human rights? Can a minister lie to the people?"

When deputy Speaker Bob Kilger rose to order Robinson to withdraw the word lie, Robinson replaced it with the word "fabricated" and Kilger didn't challenge the term.

Robinson said the Liberals are hypocritical in arguing that the Alliance should accept Fry's apology just as Liberals accepted the apology of disgraced Alliance MP Rahim Jaffer, who lied about his assistant's impersonation of him in a radio inter-

view. Robinson pointed out that Jaffer (Edmonton-Strathcona) was fired from his caucus post and demoted to the back bench.

"How low does the ethical bar have to go?" Robinson (Burnaby-Douglas) said.

Deputy Prime Minister Herb Gray cited Fry's race in his defence of the embattled junior minister.

Robinson is making "unfounded ... allegations against an immigrant to the country, against a person of colour who has devoted her life to fighting against discrimination and racism and is going to continue to do so."

Speaking briefly to reporters Friday in Iqaluit, Fry repeated her qualified apology, first offered Thursday.

"I apologized for linking the people of Prince George to that specific activity."

Fry's repeated use of the word "specific" suggests she is backing off only the inflammatory cross-burning charge but not the broader charge of intolerance in

parts of rural B.C.

Alan Dutton, of the Canadian Anti-Racism Education and Research Society in Vancouver, said there have been a number of incidents of organized racism in Prince George but he said there has been only one confirmed cross-burning incident in all of B.C. over the past 20 years, and he said that event in the early 1980s appeared to be staged for the media. It wasn't in Prince George, he said.

A *Vancouver Sun* library database search found one other incident. Police were called in 1991 when a burning cross was found on the lawn of an Iranian national living in North Vancouver.

Fry has still not explained how she could have categorically and repeatedly said there was cross-burning in Prince George, and hasn't provided a letter she said she received from the city's mayor substantiating her original assertion.