

Honesty is the policy

THE virtue of honesty may be its own reward, but it is a pleasure to see a man with courage to speak out in its favor being favorably recognized for his stand.

This happened recently to Robert S. Hancock, a supervisory negotiator at Tinker Air Force Base Logistics Center. He made it known that the price of 34 jet engine parts purchased from the Pratt & Whitney aircraft engine company had quadrupled in three years. The cost of one item went from \$16 to \$3,033 as taxpayers' money was siphoned off through procedures in effect.

Hancock was given a special achievement award and \$10,000 by the Air Force because he pointed out what was happening to officials who should have known anyway. Presumably, nothing will be done about the overcharges, except perhaps a new set of procedures.

A few days ago, the Federal Aviation Administration awarded a contract for \$480 million to Westinghouse Electric Corp. to supply a new generation of air traffic control radar systems over the next several years. Procedures like those used with Pratt & Whitney ought not be provided for in this or other new government contracts.

Because Hancock observed in his letter to officials that the overcharges cited were "only the tip of the iceberg," we may only wonder how much of this sort of thing is still going on.

Congress adopted a code of ethics for government workers

in 1958, but it seems to have been filed instead of being observed. When Congress adopted its own code of ethics it left plenty of sidegates in the honesty chute for its members to use to escape punishment.

Citizens might not condone graft, influence peddling, election fraud and other official misdeeds, but they are tolerated. Even when scores of officials have admitted committing felonies or have been convicted of crimes, too often citizens only smile and say, "Well, that's politics!"

It is more than politics. The attitude of indifference may be a reflection of what is widely regarded as a deterioration in public morality and integrity. Citizens must bear a share of the responsibility for corruption if they remain silent when appointed or elected officials are revealed to be indulging in crookedness.

It is even worse if those people are allowed to remain in office, or if they are re-elected. It is bad if public bodies continue to transact business with convicted crooks or their firms.

President George Washington may have suspected that such things could happen when he wrote: "If individuals be not influenced by moral principles it is vain to look for public virtue."

Those elected to offices may have no more integrity than their constituents. Honesty is public policy, but it will not become general practice until honest citizens insist upon honest candidates and then elect the best of those offered.