

*Oral Questions*ALLEGATION ADVANCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO  
MINISTERS—REFLECTION ON CREDIBILITY OF ISSUING  
AGENCY

**Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, I have a further question for the Acting Prime Minister as the acting spokesman for the government here today. I did not ask whether this had gone on before. We all know there used to be conflicts of interest in bygone days which are no longer tolerated. I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether in fact this is taking place and whether he will give the House assurance that it will be discontinued because its existence in modern day conditions, in view of the importance of Statistics Canada's credibility being beyond question, places that institution in a very bad and very unfortunate light. Also in view of the suggestion that the Chief Statistician has been trying to get this practice stopped I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether he will in fact see this is stopped and not try to talk about what has happened in the past.

● (1410)

**Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, has said, the government has this under review. I should like to say to the House, however, that the reason I explained that it was a long standing practice was to make it clear that it did not originate with this administration or that there had been any changes that would in any way have reflected on the integrity of Statistics Canada. I think that the information should be made known to the government as soon as possible. As I understand the situation, Statistics Canada does not hold back any publication in order to give the government advance information, either now or in the past. It is simply that when certain crude information is available, it is available to the ministers who can take action on it as quickly as possible. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition would expect that the government should get vital information of this kind as quickly as possible so that it can adapt its policies as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Stanfield:** I am surprised that such a Liberal as the Acting Prime Minister would justify some practice because it has been done for years in the past.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Starting in 1963.

**Mr. Stanfield:** May I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether this practice does not unfortunately put the Chief Statistician and Statistics Canada in a very bad light. Does not the existence of this practice tend to undermine the impartiality and the independent position of that agency, and if it is the view of the Chief Statistician that this practice should stop and that information should be made public at the same time as it is made available to the government, will the Acting Prime Minister and the government accept that view and remove Statistics Canada from the invidious position in which the government is placing it?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Sharp:** Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition that Statistics Canada

[Mr. Gillespie.]

is put in a compromising position by letting the government have certain vital information as quickly as possible. If there was any suggestion—which the chief statistician has not made—that she was under any pressure, that would be a different matter. She has never alleged that. Indeed, I think it is quite clear that she has never been subjected to any pressure to change any of the figures that have been published.

ALLEGATION ADVANCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO  
MINISTERS—SUGGESTED QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

**Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege. In light of the very damaging revelations made by the Acting Prime Minister today—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**An hon. Member:** Headlines!

**Mr. Baldwin:**—which support the statement made by the Chief Statistician who is the deputy, under the statute, of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and in light of the fact that it has obviously been admitted that members of the cabinet who are members of this House and as such in a political sense receive advance statistical information resulting in the delay and the suppression for definite periods of time of this vital information so essential to the members of the House and to the public, if Your Honour finds there is a prima facie case of privilege I would move the following motion:

That the extent to which the government in general and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce has engaged in the practice of suppressing or delaying publication of statistics of urgent public importance for one or more days after Statistics Canada has reported them to him be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**An hon. Member:** Did you have any other dreams last night, Jed?

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** I would like to get some of those officials on the witness stand.

**Mr. Baldwin:** I will be glad to interpret it for Your Honour.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member has sought the floor on a question of privilege and has outlined what he alleges to be a prima facie question of privilege. The preamble contains an allegation that there has been disclosure today of some untoward withholding of information by the ministry which is in receipt of that information, particularly the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce who I presume, without at least on the face of it further argument, would be in receipt of that information in the course of his duties. At the moment, I cannot be persuaded that that represents a prima facie question of privilege. If further information of that sort comes to light and is pressed by the hon. member for Peace River or any other member, that the hon. Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce or any other minister has in fact in any way deliberately withheld or in any way used deception in the possession of that information in the carrying out of