

INTERVIEW GIVEN TO PRESS BY MR. DE COTRET

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I gave you written notice of my question of privilege at eleven o'clock this morning. It is with regard to an interview given by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) to a *Globe and Mail* reporter, Mr. David Stewart-Patterson.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Chair can assist the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member sent to the Chair a model notice which set out the points exactly. I invite the Hon. Member to go over those points. However, I point out that the Minister, who is alleged to have made certain statements which are the subject of the complaint, is not in the Chamber today. I propose, if this would meet with the approval of the Hon. Member raising the question, to hear the Hon. Member and then adjourn the matter to allow the Minister to reply, if he wishes, and to allow other Members to make comments. Given the hour and the fact that the Minister is not here, if that is agreeable to the Hon. Member, we will proceed in that way.

Mr. Rodriguez: That is most agreeable to me, Mr. Speaker. It is important that some background be given with respect to this particular issue. Some weeks ago the Standing Committee on Employment and Immigration was questioning UI commissioners who were witnesses before the committee. These commissioners included the Chairman, Mr. Gaétan Lussier, the Deputy Minister of Employment and Immigration. At that particular meeting a member of the committee moved a motion to have the witnesses sworn. The motion was carried and the witnesses were sworn.

In an interview with Mr. David Stewart-Patterson of the *Globe and Mail* last Friday the President of the Treasury Board is quoted as having said:

It's a terrible precedent. I would never ask a public servant to testify under oath. The committee is really saying he's a liar. I don't believe that.

Later in the same interview the Minister is quoted as having said:

I would have liked to see Gaétan Lussier walk right out of the room.

The President of the Treasury Board is not the ordinary, run-of-the-mill Minister. In fact, he is the Minister of public servants. In more specific terms, he is the Minister of the mandarinat. He is their Minister.

First, in my opinion, the Minister is imputing motive to the members of the committee which can only be considered as a reflection, not only on the members of the committee, but on all Members of the House.

Citation 50 of Beauchesne's, found on page 19, reads:

A suggestion in a newspaper in 1941 that a member nominated to a committee could not act impartially was noted by the Prime Minister to be a breach of privilege but the House took no action.

In this particular instance the President of the Treasury Board is imputing motives or comments to members of the committee. He is suggesting that the members of the committee thought that Mr. Lussier was a liar and that is why the committee was putting him under oath to give testimony.

Borrowing Authority

Standing committees of this House have the power to put witnesses under oath. The Deputy Minister was appearing as a witness. The Minister is telling the Deputy Minister that he does not have to submit to Parliament. Who pays the Deputy Minister's wages? Who foots the bill for the Deputy Minister? Why, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers of Canada do. Who are the voices of the taxpayers of Canada? The Parliament of Canada, every single Member in this House, is a voice for the taxpayer. We are even more so the voice of taxpayers in committee. In fact, committees today are recognized as doing extremely important work.

The Minister shows disrespect for the Parliament of Canada by counselling the Deputy Minister to ignore a standing committee and the House. We may not have a fifth amendment in the Constitution of our country, but who needs it when we have the President of the Treasury Board? Who needs a fifth amendment when the Deputy Minister is being counselled by the big cheese of all the mandarinat to ignore the committee and Parliament?

If you find that I have a prima facie case of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I would be willing to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) who has put the matter very succinctly. Again, I commend him for the great care with which he framed his notice which was served in plenty of time. In view of the suggestion by the Chair that this matter be adjourned to another appropriate time when the Minister might want to be here, the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary has a comment.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague and your suggestion. I will bring the matter to the attention of the Minister in order that he may take the matter under advisement and consider his course of action.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BORROWING AUTHORITY ACT, 1986-87 (NO. 2)

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre), that Bill C-40, an Act to provide borrowing authority, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): When the House rose there were three minutes left in the period for questions and comments following the speech of the Hon. Member for LaSalle (Mr. Lanthier). Are there any questions? There being no questions, we will resume debate.