

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, January 12, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PURPOSE OF ISSUANCE OF IDENTITY CARDS TO MEMBERS

Mr. Speaker: May I seek the indulgence of hon. members to clarify a misunderstanding which appears to have arisen in connection with the issuance of identity cards to hon. members. It should be pointed out that this initiative was taken at the request of a number of members of the House and that the cards are intended exclusively for the convenience of hon. members who might consider them useful from time to time.

The point I would like to stress is that the issuance of the cards is not related in any way to security measures in the Parliament Buildings. Identification cards for security purposes continue as before to be required only in the case of employees of the House.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. BALDWIN—PACKAGING AND LABELLING BILL— METHOD OF CONSIDERATION BY STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Speaker: At the opening of yesterday's sitting of the House, the hon. member for Peace River rose on a question of privilege relating to proceedings before the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. The hon. member took exception to instructions issued under the authority of the chairman of that committee to the effect that only certain persons would be invited to give evidence before the committee when it considered Bill C-180. Those instructions were transmitted by letter over the signature of the clerk of the committee.

It should be noted at the outset that the conduct of the clerk has not been questioned by the hon. member since the clerk was obviously acting under instructions received from the chairman. The question to be determined is whether the chairman's action constitutes a prima facie case of privilege.

As hon. members know full well, a committee proceeding is the responsibility of the members of a committee. Indeed, citation 324 (1) of Beauchesne's Fourth Edition states that it is irregular to refer to the proceedings or to the evidence taken in a committee; such discussions can take place in the House only when a committee report has been received and is before the House for consideration.

The hon. member for Peace River suggested that the chairman of the committee had no right to decide on his

own which witnesses should be called by the committee of which he is the presiding officer. In that respect, the hon. member is on sound ground. Only the committee, by a majority, can make such a decision. The hon. member for York East, speaking to the question of privilege, claimed he had acted according to instructions received from the steering committee. That statement was questioned by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway. Obviously, the issue should be resolved by the committee rather than by the House or by referral to another standing committee.

• (2:10 p.m.)

The Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs will meet in due course and will be free to adopt whatever procedure it may deem to be appropriate in the circumstances for the calling of witnesses including, if it so wishes, a procedure different from that suggested in the committee clerk's letter. All that is required is an appropriate motion carried by a majority of its members.

I would suggest, therefore, that this matter is essentially one for the consideration of the committee. The hon. member for Peace River could have had a grievance but I suggest, with respect, that the matter does not constitute a prima facie case of breach of parliamentary privilege and that it ought not to be considered further by the House at this time.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

PENITENTIARIES

KINGSTON—INQUIRY RESPECTING INVESTIGATION OF RECENT VIOLENCE

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Solicitor General, but first of all I want to congratulate him on his recent appointment and to wish him every success.

Has the minister ordered an investigation on recent violence in Kingston Penitentiary and if so, when will a public report be available?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Goyer (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank the Leader of the official Opposition for the very kind remarks addressed to me. I hope this courteous attitude will continue for many weeks and months in our day-to-day contacts.

To reply more directly to his question, I will say that an investigation has been ordered in the normal course