

Point of Order—Mr. Ethier

Mazankowski) are two of the most faithful adherents in the House, and that the only reason they would be away would likely be because of public business.

I am advised that the Minister of Transport is in Winnipeg today meeting with the western transportation ministers, and I do hope that the hon. member would think that that is part of ministerial practice. The government has taken the view from the beginning that, except for the necessary attendance of ministers at meetings elsewhere, their appropriate place is in the House of Commons, and I think we have adhered to that pretty well.

[Translation]

MR. ETHIER—REQUEST FOR PRESENTATION OF REPORT IN BOTH OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Denis Ethier (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Mr. Speaker I understood earlier when you ruled on our two questions of privilege, namely that of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) and mine, that there might have been an error. After I stated my point of privilege, I attached a motion to it, and I said:

That the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) be asked to appear before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections so that it be ordered that the said report be withdrawn and not made available to anyone until all hon. members can get it in either of the two official languages.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that you ruled on the propriety of that report. But I said during my intervention, and I repeat today, that a less than scrupulous government can do what it wants. That is not what I want to say. I asked for a report in my own language, and I did not hear anything about that. If it is your decision that those reports can continue to be released in English only, I must say it is a sad day for us French Canadians and that this promotes the cause of Mr. René Lévesque in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. member will realize in reading what I have said today that the document to which he referred became, in that context, an internal document, and it was so treated in terms of the actual report itself. The public document to which he referred, the press release, may be what he was referring to as being in one language. However, I understood that his complaint was with regard to the report of the internal caucus committee. I have already indicated to the House that that is one reason why there is a severe danger in making such reports and then supporting them with public funds. The minute they are supported with public funds there is the demand that they be presented in a bilingual form, respecting the Official Languages Act, and that, therefore, is an unwise activity.

[Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton).]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

STATISTICS CANADA

APPOINTMENT OF COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY TO REVIEW OPERATION OF AGENCY

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House today of several steps I am taking to deal with questions and concerns relating to Statistics Canada.

First, I do not want my remarks to imply that I consider Statistics Canada to be ineffective or deficient in carrying out its mandate. While I have listened to the crescendo of complaints and criticisms of the agency, I am also well aware that Statistics Canada is vitally important to Canadians and to Canadian institutions and businesses, and that to many of those who deal directly with it, Statistics Canada is one of the best agencies of its kind in the world. For example, I received the following comment just a few days ago in a letter from the general manager of Data Resources of Canada:

We currently reap the benefits of the best statistical collection agency in the world.

That view is shared by others who have been in touch with me directly to express their support for Statistics Canada and, in particular, to commend that agency's technical know-how.

It is worth noting here how critical it is that we can continue to have the utmost faith in this agency. Think of the legislation based on its figures and the programs and decisions involving processes which cannot do without Statistics Canada data. Let me cite a few examples. The consumer price index is used for indexing of old age security and family allowances and in support of COLA clauses in collective agreements, public service pensions and personal income tax.

The labour force survey is used for virtually all labour market policies and planning. The census underlies all social and economic planning and programming. Trade figures have a great relevance. Gross national product statistics are vital, and the monthly employment and unemployment releases are critical. In short, in a modern society about everything we do requires some sort of measurement, and without Statistics Canada we cannot function as a modern society.

Because of Statistics Canada's importance to Canada and because of my desire for a full and constructive review, the easiest thing for me to do would be to agree to a public inquiry into Statistics Canada, possibly by a parliamentary committee.

I have been critical of the agency in the past, and I have no interest in concealing any inadequacies which might exist. I am greatly concerned, however, that if we do not deal sensitively with the perceived and real problems of Statistics Canada, we may destroy the agency's credibility, morale and, ultimately, its effectiveness. I say this because it appears that many of Statistics Canada's alleged problems are inextricably bound up with human relationships and attitudes, not with the basic methodologies used by the agency.