

Routine Proceedings

contempt would be taken into consideration by the House.

As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, your role at this stage is simply to decide whether the facts before you are sufficient to conclude that the conduct or omission complained of might reasonably be found by the House itself to constitute contempt rather than whether the conduct or omission amounts to contempt.

The substantive question here of whether or not the failure to table this Order in Council was a contempt of the House is a decision for the House to make.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that there can be little doubt that the minister's failure to table a document required to be tabled by this House, whether intentional or accidental, tends to diminish the authority of the House of Commons and is something that might reasonably be held to constitute contempt by this House.

• (1525)

In this regard I have referred the House to the remarks made by you, Mr. Speaker, on February 5, 1992 in relation to my earlier question. At that time, Mr. Speaker, you warned those responsible for meeting any deadlines for the tabling of documents to reflect carefully on the possible consequences of ignoring tabling requirements. Mr. Speaker, I regret to say that your advice seems to have fallen on deaf ears at the Department of Finance.

While I mention the minister's officials the fact remains that under our doctrine of ministerial responsibility the minister is accountable to this House for the acts and omissions of his officials. However tempting it may be to lift the veil of ministerial responsibility we cannot do so and the minister must accept, as I am sure he will, his responsibility for the failings of his officials.

Considering what took place in February last year it appears that decisive action by this House will be required if our collective right to be informed of the making of orders pursuant to subsection 59(2) of the Customs Tariff, within the time prescribed by Parliament, in this case 15 sittings days, is to be respected.

In closing, having mentioned that we went through this a year ago and that you, Mr. Speaker, gave a warning that the Department of Finance was put on notice then I want to indicate that in the event you accept my

submission I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I did listen with interest and I can only assure the hon. member that I will look into it and report back to the House as soon as I possibly can. I appreciate his raising it at this time, but not having had an opportunity to study it I am not in a position to respond in a definitive way. I certainly will look into it immediately.

Mr. Speaker: I just want to be sure that both the hon. member and the minister understand the position of the Chair in this.

I have heard the argument. I believe the minister has indicated that he wants to look more carefully at the matter and will come back. I will listen to the minister when that takes place and subsequent to that I will make a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Charles A. Langlois (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 264 petitions.

[*Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

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[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION

ASIA PACIFIC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Mr. Robert Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report on the inaugural meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum held in Tokyo, Japan on January 14 and 15, 1993.