

*Question of Privilege—Mr. Rodriguez*

system. Ministers are responsible to this House for action taken on their behalf. On the other hand, public officials have the obligation to support their Minister in his relations with Parliament. In keeping with a long-standing tradition, Mr. Speaker, public employees must not express their views nor make speeches on the options being considered by the Government, but they must help the Minister convey to this House and its committees factual and objective information related to the management of programs under the jurisdiction of the Minister involved.

Mr. Speaker, no one ought to question the integrity and professionalism of public servants. No one ought to question the respect which public servants have for our democratic institutions. Therefore my remarks to the press expressed my astonishment at the extraordinary and uncommon request that a senior official be sworn in, something which has very seldom been heard of in the parliamentary records of this House. As a matter of fact certain committee members, the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt among others, did acknowledge this during the committee proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that public servants have always been very heedful of the expectations of Parliament, ever respectful of ministerial responsibility and our parliamentary traditions. This relationship between public servants and parliamentary committees has always been based on mutual confidence and respect, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that all Members of the House are anxious to maintain and strengthen this tradition.

Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that my remarks should be misinterpreted. I cannot imagine how the Hon. Member can allege that, and I quote:

The Minister shows disrespect for . . . Parliament by counselling the Deputy Minister to ignore a standing committee of the House.

First of all, I never did counsel any Deputy Minister, this one or any other, to ignore a standing committee of the House. On the contrary, I always encouraged them to give frank and honest evidence, and to divulge any information sought by Hon. Members of this House. All I wanted to do, Mr. Speaker, was to recall our principles and our parliamentary traditions.

The remarks I made during the *Globe and Mail* interview reflected my concern about a procedure which I deem inappropriate and unnecessary, and which, I might add, may very well undermine the climate of confidence and co-operation required for the smooth operation of Parliament and the Government machinery.

• (1510)

[English]

**Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the committee in question, I want to make a brief statement. To some extent it is incumbent upon me to make it clear that, after spending many hours together, it is my understanding from committee members that if the action taken at the meeting in question in any way brought the

loyalty and good work of the public service of Canada into question we would like to apologize for perhaps leaving that impression. That was certainly not the intent of the committee. We join with the Minister in applauding the efforts of the Canadian public service which does valuable work for Canadians.

The record of that meeting shows that four people were sworn in on that occasion. They were commissioners of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Technically it was not the Deputy Minister who was being sworn in but a commissioner of a Crown agency who happened also to be a Deputy Minister. However, it was in their capacity as commissioners of the Unemployment Insurance Commission that these people were sworn in.

Finally, I understand that this incident has caused a great deal of discussion, at many levels of the public service as well as within Cabinet, among the Clerks at the Table, Members of Parliament and other committee chairmen. The dilemma is when it is appropriate to swear in witnesses. Indeed, Beauchesne provides the power for committees to be masters of their own destiny. Therefore, I submit that in the final analysis the choice must rest with the committee and its members on any given occasion.

I believe some of the concern raised by the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) and other Members, particularly one Member from Montreal who serves as vice-chairman of our committee, deals with the issue of rights of committee members to compel people to attend committee meetings and be witnesses before those meetings. There was a suggestion in the article in question that it might have been wise for a civil servant, when faced with a request from the committee to be sworn in, to leave the meeting.

Before you rule on this matter, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that you may wish to reflect upon that. If the committee has advertised a meeting with witnesses, and those witnesses have agreed to appear, would it indeed be wise for them to leave when they are asked to be sworn in, or would that almost compel the committee to report to Parliament on the issue of whether or not that particular witness was in contempt of Parliament as a result of that unwillingness to be sworn in when Beauchesne enables committees to swear witnesses? If that would lead one to conclude that contempt of Parliament would be shown, it would lead to a situation more serious than the present situation. I urge you to reflect upon that principle before responding to the issue.

**Mr. Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the remarks by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration, on which I sit. It is unfortunate that other chairpersons of Standing Committees are not here to participate in this question of privilege.

I listened to the Minister. He admitted that the press report is accurate. He went on at some length about the competence of senior civil servants, their loyalty and so on. That is not in