

Privilege—Mr. D. MacDonald

I wish to refer in particular to two statements which the minister made at that time. First of all, in answer to my second question, he said:

I find it quite proper and quite normal for bodies of that nature to check the facts, rather than to do as the hon. member has done too often on this subject of the status of women, putting on the record of this House statements which are not correct and are not accurate.

The minister then went on to say, with reference to the plans and programs having to do with equal opportunity:

I have stated that those plans of action, once they have been filed with Treasury Board, are available for examination. I do not know exactly what the situation is today, but if the hon. member wishes to have access to some of those documents, he need only ask Treasury Board and he can see them for himself. I have stated repeatedly that those documents are available.

As the minister suggested, I have raised this matter with him on a number of occasions. As far back as March 6, when we had a debate on an opposition day here, the minister made remarks referring to the programs for equal opportunity. He indicated, as reported at page 3484 of *Hansard*—

And for fiscal year 1977-78, on top of their annual program, the various departments had to develop long term programs, that is, five-year programs and measurable objectives.

A little later he said:

What is important is that the trend being established is a positive one. It is quite clearly established by the statistics that have been published and made available up until this time.

Inasmuch as I pointed out to the minister on that occasion, that the statistics up to that point were very superficial and were, indeed, only over-all summaries of a succession of departmental reports, I asked him on March 8 whether he would assist the House by arranging for the publication of the full reports of each department. As reported on page 3565, the minister replied:

I want to assure the hon. member that reports which have been requested of all departments have been filed and have been received by Treasury Board. Treasury Board has assigned officers to review these reports with the individual departments to see whether further improvements can be made in terms of plans. I will be glad to see what information can be made public in this respect, in addition to all the information which is being made public by the Public Service Commission on an annual basis and also in appearances before the parliamentary committee.

If Treasury Board can also provide additional information to the hon. member when the estimates come, I will certainly be very happy to help; and I am sure my colleague will be very happy to make that information available. At the present time, these reports are being reviewed with individual departments by officials of Treasury Board.

Further, on March 20, again with respect to these reports and plans, the minister said:

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the President of the Treasury Board will want to expand on this. The only thing I can tell the hon. member is that we have, indeed, decided to make these figures available. I understand the President of the Treasury Board is reviewing the appropriate time and method of making them available. This is a matter of compiling and getting the information translated. As far as the availability of the information and the content of the plans of the various departments is concerned, the government has agreed to make the information available on a regular basis as soon as it is available.

After all that, Mr. Speaker, and the very definite commitment by the minister yesterday afternoon following what I can only assume is the kind of hit and run response in which the minister likes to engage on this issue, I find, on conferring with

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

my office this morning, that as long as one and a half months ago, in response to direct inquiries of Treasury Board officials we were told that these annual reports would not be made available. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when I conferred again myself with a Treasury Board official today I discovered not only that there was no plan to make them available this year but that a definite agreement was made earlier this year, I think during the summer, between Treasury Board and all the various departments submitting these equal opportunity reports, not to make them public. There is apparently some possibility of publishing them next year and there will, as usual, be some kind of over-all summary which will tell us little or nothing.

I do not intend to use this occasion to deal with the minister's debating point—whether or not I provide accurate comments with respect to this matter. That is a matter for debate, as you would no doubt agree, or else a grievance on the part of one hon. member. But I am very much concerned that the minister should tell me on two successive occasions that he is making every effort to make this information available—he has said on two occasions that it is available—yet when I make representations directly to Treasury Board I find not only that they are unaware of these commitments that the minister has made in this House but that they have taken a definite decision in the opposite direction. I think the kind of answer given successively by the minister in this House affects the privileges of all members on a matter which I regard as being of very great importance.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I think there has been some confusion between the hon. member and myself about certain aspects of this question. As he well knows, the annual report tabled by the President of the Treasury Board is a summary of the reports tabled by various departments. It has been produced this year and was published, I believe, before the summer adjournment.

As to the individual reports by departments the hon. member is quite right. These have not been released as yet and have not been made public. I am sorry if I misled the hon. member yesterday in that respect—it is obviously just stronger evidence that we should perhaps check the facts very carefully before making statements such as he himself made when he made allegations about so-called possible censorship by the Public Service Commission of an Advisory Council on the Status of Women report.

As far as my own statement of yesterday is concerned, indeed, it stands to be corrected. These reports have not been made accessible as yet but I can assure the hon. member that the Treasury Board has not made a decision not to make them public. I checked at two o'clock with the official the hon. member spoke to and he assured me that his problem was not that he had given a commitment to the departments not to make them public but that he had not told the departments when they were drafting their reports that they would be made public. So the matter is still an open one.