

appeared as witnesses before the parliamentary committee. The Advisory Committee on the Status of Women appeared on November 21, and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women appeared on November 27. Both directed many of their remarks to this clause in the bill. They were protesting the provision as it pertains to part-time workers. They had no idea at the time they were making their intervention that the order in council dealing with this specific provision had already been enacted.

What I find very interesting in the remarks of the minister is that he has made the rather fallacious argument that members of parliament should have been aware of what was gazetted. I have no doubt that the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), when he gets up every morning, reads the *Canada Gazette* as his first order of business.

Mr. McGrath: It is a real best seller.

Miss MacDonald: But I am not sure that everybody does that. However, it was quite evident, when representatives of these women's groups addressing this issue were before the committee, that they had not been informed that such an order in council had already put this provision into effect.

If the minister feels that members of parliament should have been aware of that provision—and he may have reason for feeling that members of parliament should have been informed—surely it was the duty of his officials sitting in committee on those two occasions to inform those witnesses of what had been promulgated by the order in council. Surely it was their duty, knowing that the representatives of these women's groups were raising this very point, to inform them at that time. That is what makes a mockery of the whole proceedings. Witnesses come before committees to deal with a specific piece of legislation and they are not even informed that their arguments are no longer relevant.

The reason I say that it is a form of contempt on behalf of the witnesses is that it can only lead to more cynicism on the part of people who appear before parliamentary committees to make justifiable arguments which they want to put forward strongly. If we are going to make a mockery of the system in that way, and if we are going to allow ourselves to be party to undermining the system in that way, then I think it is not only a contempt and a breach of the privileges of members of parliament but a contempt and breach of the privileges of every witness and of every Canadian citizen who appears before a parliamentary committee and is so treated.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to give my thoughts on this question of privilege because I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration from the time we started discussing Bill C-14. At no point was I aware or had an indication from the minister or from officials of the department that, when we came to examine clause 2, what we were discussing did not matter because it was already the law. Just suppose the committee had defeated clause 2, what then? The answer is, of course, that it would still be the law because

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

the order in council would have stood as the law. We were there as members of parliament believing that we had some control over the legislation which was being examined in committee when, in effect, we had no control at all.

The minister and the officials put forward the argument that they have the legal right to do this, and they quoted the section of the act under which they claim they have the legal right. If they had the legal right to do it, then why did they need to repeat verbatim the same clause in Bill C-14? If they had the authority of the order in council, then why make fools of members of parliament and have us go through the charade of thinking that we could decide whether or not that clause was acceptable and would become law?

That seems to be an extremely important point because what the officials are saying to members of parliament and what the government is saying, in effect, is: be fruitful, go forth and multiply. All of us resent that type of treatment. At no point during committee stage, up until yesterday, were we informed that there was an order in council which made that particular clause in the bill effective.

● (1512)

Deliberations on Bill C-14 ought to be suspended, and a reference ought to be made to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments for examination of this particular regulation. How often is this repeated in other legislation? If I introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons for something which is already the law—for example, a private member's bill requesting an unemployment insurance program in Canada—the first thing I would be told is that it was out of order because an unemployment insurance program already exists in Canada. How can the government bring in a bill which contains a clause that is law already? The entire question is out of order.

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments ought to look at this particular situation occasioned by the order in council. The committee could expedite its deliberations on this particular point and bring back a decision to the House on which the House may decide before going forward with the consideration of Bill C-14.

It is an extremely important principle. The people of Nickel Belt and the constituents of all members are under the impression that somehow their members of parliament have some control over the legislative system in the country. Lo and behold, this particular incident indicates how foolhardy we have been concerning the democratic process. In effect, members of parliament do not have control. The bureaucrats and the government have complete control. It is a sham and a shambles to think hon. members have control. I resent that on behalf of the people of Nickel Belt and all other Canadians.

The government is in contempt of parliament. I have no hesitation in making that charge. The minister, the officials in his department, and the government are in contempt of parliament. They should have come clean and told us the truth. We did not receive the truth. We received an apology, which they hoped would move things forward in committee yesterday.