

Privilege—Mr. Stevens

In the present economic circumstances one could claim that 4.3 per cent is weak. I can disagree with the hon. member and say that it is rather strong. Only Japan and the United States outperformed Canada in that part of the year.

We can argue, but I want to assure the hon. member that when I made that speech, I based it on the facts which were available to me and my ministry at that time. When I was the minister responsible for Statistics Canada, statistics would come to me as minister of industry, trade and commerce the night before they were published. At no time did I make those statistics available to other ministers, even at times relative to inflation and unemployment. I kept them to myself, and they were not distributed to other departments. Statistics Canada is completely independent from the government. It publishes its own statistics. We can argue whether growth of 4.3 per cent for the last half of last year is strong enough, but I think it is a good base. I do not think there is any basis for arguing that I deliberately misled the House or the public. I think there is no question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: We are clearly, in the most classic terms, in the field of argumentation or dispute as to facts. The matter is not in any way related to privilege and therefore cannot go any further.

MR. STEVENS—ALLEGED MISREPRESENTATION BY MINISTER OF FINANCE

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. My question of privilege arises from the remarks made by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) in defence of what I felt was a proper representation on the part of the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent). The minister has misled the House again. The Montreal speech to which reference was made did not refer to the last half of 1977. I refer specifically to the following wording:

Economic growth in both the third and fourth quarters of 1977 was at or above the long-term potential rate for the economy.

Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey): That is the last half of 1977.

Mr. Stevens: The important thing is that the minister referred specifically to the third and fourth quarters. The third quarter did show the growth to which the minister is referring. That is the 5.2 per cent growth which is above the 5 per cent real growth target which is looked upon as our potential. The fourth quarter figures are very clear. They show .8 per cent, which is 3.2 per cent on an annualized basis. This is below the potential.

● (1532)

The fact is that the minister misled both his audience in Montreal and members of the House by saying he was referring to the second half. He was not referring to the second half. He created the impression that the third quarter was above its potential level and that the fourth quarter was above its potential level as far as real growth is concerned. From an economic standpoint there is a very important distinction

[Mr. Chrétien.]

between what he said today and what he said in Montreal. If the fourth quarter is—

Mr. Speaker: Order please. The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) is right back where we were before, which is a direct confrontation on an interpretation to be placed on remarks of the minister made outside the House.

Mr. Stevens: No, here.

Mr. Speaker: Order please. On a procedural basis the extent to which this dispute exists is not any concern of the Chair. It remains a dispute and not in any way a procedural problem.

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NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

First report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on the National Capital Region—Mr. Francis.

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STATISTICS ACT

AMENDMENT TO SECURE RELEASE OF CERTAIN CENSUS RETURNS

Mr. Frank Maine (Wellington) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-422, to amend the Statistics Act (release of pre-1900 census returns).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in response to the concerns of Mrs. Jacqueline Norris, past chairman of the Wellington-Waterloo branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society and other members of similar Canadian genealogical organizations, I wish to introduce a bill entitled an act to amend the Statistics Act, calling for the release of individual returns to a census taken prior to January 1, 1900.

While section 16 of the Canada Statistics Act is addressed to secrecy and prohibits the divulging of census return information, no section of the act is addressed to a mechanism for the eventual release of this census data. There appears to be no overriding reason to prevent public access to this pre-1900 census information.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

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COMPENSATION FOR FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR ACT

AMENDMENT TO EXTEND SCOPE OF BENEFITS

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-27, to amend the Compensation for Former Prisoners of War Act.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.