

Oral Questions

understand it, is a policy agreed to by all sides of the House to encourage Canadians of whatever heritage to interrelate.

The work done by the organization of Christians and Jews is exemplary. We have a close working relationship with them, and I think that was continued by the previous government as well. I simply said there was a problem. I do not think the government should get into the position of starting to judge material sent out to be sure that those materials include every possible religious faith so as to be sure we are absolutely fair. We should give as a priority the encouragement of intercultural activity which is not based on material such as those particular calendars. It is my view at the moment, as I said in my previous answer, that they are very expensive, and therefore limited in the numbers that can be distributed.

We have a limited budget; it is now at about \$10 million. We have a number of demands for a number of different reasons and there must be priorities. It is simply a matter of priorities which has led to this current decision. I have already said, however, that I will certainly look at the matter again.

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[Translation]

FISHERIES**DAMAGES SUSTAINED BY COD FISHERMEN IN GASPÉ—REQUEST FOR INQUIRY**

Mr. Alexandre Cyr (Gaspé): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Has the minister been advised that 18 herring seine boats came within a mile of the coast at Cloridorme in the Gaspé Peninsula where they damaged almost 55 cod nets belonging to inshore fishermen and costing about \$300 each?

As it is not the first time such an incident has occurred in that area, will the minister see to it that a complete inquiry is made into the situation, with a view to finding the captains of the boats involved in damaging the equipment of the Gaspé fishermen and getting them to pay damages?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, that incident was indeed brought up a few days ago. We have sent one of our representatives to look into the matter on the spot. There were damages, in some cases where the nets were not marked precisely as the rules demand to avoid that type of incident. But I can say to the hon. member that the damages involved will be reimbursed by the seine boat owners association. We feel it is possible to avoid those incidents. What is important is for everyone to be willing to respect the rules: they exist specifically to protect everyone.

[English]

PRIVILEGE**MR. McGRATH—GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN**

Madam Speaker: On Thursday last the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) raised a question of privilege, the gist of which is set out in his proposed motion where he asked:

That the matter of the financing of public advertising campaigns at taxpayers expense on behalf of a partisan policy or opinion, before such policy or opinion has been approved by the House of Commons, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

In brief, the issue is whether the allegation that the government is using public funds to publicize its parliamentary position on the constitutional question constitutes a prima facie case of breach of privilege. While this is a very important matter, the Speaker is compelled to examine it in the context of parliamentary privilege, and particularly whether it constitutes, on its face, a breach of parliamentary privilege or contempt of Parliament.

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the rights and immunities necessary for the House and members to do their parliamentary work, and includes the necessary power of the House to enforce these rights and immunities. This excludes any matter for which a solution may be found in the Standing Orders or practices of the House, or the statute law.

In brief, these privileges of members are: freedom of speech in the House, the right to attend their parliamentary work without being subject to subpoenas to be a witness in other arenas, without being called for jury duty, and without being subject to civil arrest. In addition, the House itself has the power to provide for its own constitution, its own procedure, to discipline its members and to punish for contempt.

It seems to me that what is at issue here is the propriety of the government in spending public funds to advertise its position in the current constitutional question. The hon. member for St. John's East, in his eloquent manner, has expressed a concern that the parliamentary rules and privileges are in tune with the times, particularly the privilege of freedom of speech.

He, along with other members, is aware that the old High Court of Parliament met in secret, that publication of its proceedings was forbidden, and that the only privilege accorded members was to ensure their safe arrival to, in effect, do the King's and his Council's bidding. When the House of Commons evolved separately somewhere in the mid-fourteenth century, while this freedom from arrest to attend the sittings was already established, members still had to work on the freedom to speak freely in debate which was asserted for the first time by Speaker Thomas More only in 1523. This privilege was subsequently firmly established by the Bill of Rights in 1688.

The original purpose then of this privilege was, as the hon. member for St. John's East rightly pointed out, to guarantee the conditions necessary for productive debate, and he, as well as others, is concerned that the actions of the government play havoc with this privilege or right. The lively debate which this question of privilege initiated deals to a great extent with the