

Special Committee on child care is not a comprehensive response as envisioned by Standing Order 99(2).

In order to assist, we would have to refer to a dictionary to determine what the word "comprehensive" means. I am sure most Hon. Members have a pretty good understanding of what it means. It is obvious as well that the Minister has some difficulties with regard to the definition of "comprehensive". Therefore, I would like to recommend to him a current edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, without suggesting for a moment that an older edition might have a different definition of the word "comprehensive".

Nonetheless, this particular edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* which comes from the Journals Branch and was published not long ago gives the following definition for the word "comprehensive":

—including much or all (*comprehensive term; comprehensive grasp*.)—

The definition of a comprehensive school is a large secondary school providing courses for children of all abilities. I could go on describing the definition of the word "comprehensive" but it is obvious that this two-page reply from the Minister is not comprehensive.

In fact, the Minister admits as much in the letter when he says that it is an interim response. I suppose one could argue both sides of whether or not an interim response could be considered comprehensive. If in fact it was a comprehensive response, why would it have to be called an interim response? Then again, one could have a comprehensive interim response as opposed to a brief interim response.

In any event, to conclude, the issue before you is whether or not there has been a breach of Standing Order 99(2). I think the evidence is clear, unequivocal and uncontradicted that in fact there has been a breach of this particular Standing Order.

The question becomes what the sanction ought to be. Can we prosecute the Government and the Minister in a court of law for breaching this particular Standing Order? The answer, of course, is no, we cannot. Are there sanctions in the standing rules? The answer, of course, is no.

It is obvious that the Government has shown contempt for Parliament by providing a "Dear Shirley" letter when it should have provided a comprehensive response. I do not mean to lecture the Government or the Minister, but recognizing that Standing Order 99(2) exists, the Government ought to have come to the House at the earliest opportunity to seek—if I could have the Minister's attention?

Mr. Lewis: It's your Member.

Mr. Nunziata: If I could just make one final point without the constant interruptions I have encountered from across the floor, the proper course for the Government to have taken would have been to come to the House to seek the unanimous

consent of Parliament to provide an interim response and to extend the time period provided by Standing Order 99(2). Of course, some Hon. Members might have denied that unanimous consent but rather than taking that course, the Government chose to show contempt for the rules, for the Chair, for the House and for every Member in it by providing this "Dear Shirley" letter. I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to first conclude that there has been a breach and second to severely reprimand the Government for its irresponsible act, its incompetence and its contempt for this House.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank all Hon. Members for their interventions. As I said, the matter is an important one and it is a somewhat difficult one.

The Chair is aware that the rule which has been quoted in English also exists in French and the word in French is "globale" and it is "comprehensive" in English. There may be some difficulties with that.

I know Hon. Members would understand why the Chair would want to defer any immediate judgment on the matter, particularly taking into account the fact that I have already had to comment on this particular sort of complaint, although I am not saying the other complaint was absolutely identical. However, I think it is also fair to comment that as the Minister has explained, whether it is procedurally excusable or not is something I have to decide.

The Government did seem to have some problems in being as comprehensive as it would later wish to be and I am sure Hon. Members would not want, at least at this point, to assume that there was any bad motivation on the Government's part. However, the procedural rules are there to be followed.

In this case, I think the matter is a serious one and I will give it careful consideration. I thank the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) for bringing the matter to my attention and I thank the Minister for being here and for responding as fully as he did.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 106(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Government's response to the 170 petitions Nos. 332-2782 and 332-2784 to 332-2952 inclusive.