

Privilege—Mr. Cossitt

servatives administered the Local Initiatives Program during their brief stay in power.

Madam Speaker, you will recall how the program has been administered for about ten years, when the member concerned, whatever his party, made his recommendations to the minister. However, during the few months that the Conservatives were in power—and I am thinking about the region that I represented, the Gaspé peninsula, where no Conservative member was elected—the then minister, Mr. Atkey, ignored the recommendations of elected members and consulted defeated candidates of the Progressive Conservative Party. And I still recall hearing Mr. Atkey explain in the House why, contrary to the previous Liberal government, he would consult defeated Conservative candidates.

Therefore, criticizing the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) for consulting certain members of Parliament without evading her own responsibilities seems to me completely unjustified, especially coming from a party which, during its brief stay in power, ignored this basic rule of consulting the elected members of Parliament.

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Madam Speaker, I would only like to add a comment about the question of privilege. I believe the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) indicated a moment ago that she was not aware of this letter which is said to have been sent—

Miss Bégin: No, I never said that.

Mr. La Salle: I believe the minister has asked to read the letter mentioned by the hon. member. It seems clear to me, after hearing the question of privilege, that a letter allegedly has been sent to Liberal members so that they may object to a New Horizons project. I suggest that is what my colleague has said.

I know from past experience, and I appreciate very much the services of this department, that we are advised of the fact that a project will eventually be announced, and we are asked not to announce it because it is still at the development stage, so in the end we are advised a few days in advance about a given project. That is established practice. However, if it is true that Liberal members of Parliament are invited, on a particular matter, to object to a project, this is obviously inadmissible. In the circumstances, it seems that the minister wishes to have a closer look at the document mentioned today. And, with this in mind, I do hope she will correct this additional privilege which is obviously unacceptable.

As for the remarks made by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. De Bané) concerning our approach to the distribution of local initiative projects, Madam Speaker, a serious evaluation of the existing system since the inception of the program would reveal there was need for corrective measures and that still holds true.

● (1520)

[English]

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Madam Speaker, it was not my intention to intervene in the debate, but there were some queries raised by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. De Bané) which I think took the matter away from the appropriate matter before you.

The question raised is the privileges which affect members of this House in relation to their work and in relation to their constituents regarding the New Horizons program, and I think we should confine our concerns to that. The program which this question can affect, the New Horizons program, is probably one of the most enlightened programs this federal government offers.

As the minister knows, there is an incredible number of applications which come in, and the criteria for selection have to be so fair, open, and above board that people will trust the selection system. This is absolutely crucial, particularly in this program—almost above any other—and it seems to me that it is incumbent upon the Chair, and certainly upon the minister, by statement or by whatever appropriate procedure that you, Madam Speaker, have at your disposal, to make sure that the credibility of the selection process is restored. It is therefore absolutely essential that the minister make that statement or, it seems to me, that you should allow for a procedure which would make sure that every senior citizen organization in this country can again trust the system of selection, now that the matter has been raised.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: At the outset, I would say that the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) was probably misled by the interpretation. My understanding of what the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) said is that she was replying with reservation as she had not recently read the memorandum in question. I think the right hon. Leader of the Opposition understood something entirely different, to the effect that she had never seen this memorandum. But, if my understanding is correct, she was expressing herself with reservation because the memorandum had been written, it seems, some time ago.

On the question of privilege, I must advise the hon. member that I was somewhat lenient with him since this question did not arise out of today's proceedings. But, as he sent me a little note during question period, I decided to hear him. Be that as it may, though I did not receive as much of an advance notice as I would have wished, I will nevertheless decide on the question of privilege. I do not think there is substance here for a question of privilege. As hon. members know, the question of privilege is very restricted. A member's privilege is usually an action of some nature which prevents him from fulfilling his duties as a member. Now, I am under the impression that all hon. members who took part in the debate today were able to fulfil their duties as members for they were able to protest