

UNITED NATIONS

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS—NON-ATTENDANCE OF PRIME MINISTER

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, if I may rephrase my question, I merely wanted to ask the Prime Minister whether he would explain to the House why he was not representing Canada at the anniversary celebrations of the United Nations?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the answer is quite simple. The invitation to visit the U.S.S.R. was extended to me nearly a year ago, I believe, by the then visiting Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union. Dates began to be negotiated between both governments, and some time last—

An hon. Member: Who was it who arranged the dates?

Mr. Trudeau: Well, if you do not want an answer, talk to your own member.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, with due deference to the right hon. gentleman I think we deserve an answer to what is a straightforward question. If the Prime Minister does not choose to answer that question, then could I ask the right hon. gentleman whether or not the FLQ precipitated crisis is going to interfere with his plans to visit the U.S.S.R.?

Mr. Diefenbaker: Ha, ha, ha!

Mr. Trudeau: Someone thinks it's funny. Ask the right hon. member for Prince Albert, who says "ha, ha, ha."

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Has the right hon. gentleman a supplementary?

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister pointed at me a moment ago, and I would like to ask him whether he is sure he is going to have the necessary protection, with armed guards in battle dress, when he goes on this trip?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not think that question is acceptable.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

STERILIZATION OF ESKIMO WOMEN

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, if I may interrupt the exchange between the two right hon. gentlemen, may I direct a question to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development which I asked him last Friday. I intended to follow it up by asking a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare but

Inquiries of the Ministry

he is absent even though he is scheduled to be here. May I ask the minister whether any investigation has been made into the question of sterilization of Eskimo women, particularly on Victoria Island in the Holman Island community?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I got in touch with the Minister of National Health and Welfare and I am informed that there is no program of sterilization of women in this government, I mean in this area. However, a few women from the Holman Island community and from other villages have been sterilized. I think there were seven such cases during the year at Yellowknife. In each case, the written consent of the wife and husband, as well as that of two physicians, have been secured.

[*English*]

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, when the minister says that there was the consent of the woman and the husband—

Mr. Trudeau: And two doctors.

Mr. Lewis: —and two doctors—by the way, Mr. Speaker, I was not talking about sterilization of the government—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: —this conveys to me that somebody sought the consent of the people involved. I should like to ask the minister whether an inquiry has been made to determine if these people were approached by someone representing the health department seeking their consent and, if so, would that not represent a program of seeking consent? Were they talked to in their own language and, if not, was there an interpreter present? If the minister does not have that information, would he be good enough to find out these very important details about what happened?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I can find out all those facts for the hon. member but I think what happened there is exactly what happens elsewhere in Canada. There is consent of the people concerned and two physicians. I think that is a fair policy, but I can inquire to find out if there was any pressure. If there was some pressure it should be condemned, but according to the facts I have there was no pressure at all. It was done with the consent of the woman and her husband and after consultation with two physicians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, to follow up the preceding question and the answer given by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, could the latter inform the House at whose request such sterilization was done? Was it at the request of the Indians themselves?

Mr. Chrétien: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to know how this took place. Probably the women were admitted to hospital, the doctors discussed the matter