

government. In specific terms, that group of five, that caucus committee is really a political committee, a partisan committee. When we look up the word "caucus" in Harraps' Dictionary, we find the definition "political clique". That is precisely what I mean when I say it may not and must not be financed by taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, the mere fact of having authorized public expenditures for a political group such as the five-member committee proves that my question of privilege is well-founded and that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) could be called upon to appear before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to explain the propriety or legality, if you would rather, of those expenditures. But, Mr. Speaker, that is not the only reason for my question of privilege, because it could happen that a less than scrupulous government, such as the one we now have, would support groups with political affiliations. Instead, I shall refer you to the last three lines of that press release which read as follows:

Copies of the report are available in English from Information Services, Agriculture Canada, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0C7.

The document is in the process of translation and will be available shortly in French.

That means the media can obtain this information. Those three lines, Mr. Speaker, add insult to injury. As I said earlier, a government without scruples can commit public funds in politically-oriented ventures. It can also show its arrogance, as the present government has done, by neglecting members of Parliament and inviting only the media to ask for copies of this report which was prepared and written by civil servants paid by public funds. That is a clear indication of this government's arrogant attitude.

I have just shown how injury was caused by offering copies of the report only to the media. I would now like to demonstrate the insult aspect. The press release finishes by stating:

The document is in the process of translation and will be available shortly in French.

I noted in the report that no French-speaking group was invited to submit a brief. Does that mean that the report was to be unilingual and that the new Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) and his department no longer comply with the Official Languages Act? Mr. Speaker, since passage of the Official Languages Act, which recognizes that French and English are the two official languages of this country, yourself and your predecessor have always complied and ensured compliance with this act with utmost respect. I congratulate you in that regard and it is with no assurance that I rise today on this question of privilege. In his press release, the minister emphasizes the importance of this report and even notes that the report will be of considerable help in developing beef import legislation.

Mr. Speaker, given the importance of this report as underlined by the minister, is it not fair to admit that it is equally important to me in my mother tongue, in French? Is it not of equal importance to the people who read only one of the

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official languages, that is French? After all, their tax money also contributed to pay for the publication of this report. Is it not of equal importance to this meat producer who reads only French? Is it not of equal importance to the Canadian consumer who reads only French? Is it not equally important to all hon. members of this House who, like millions of proud Canadians, read only French?

Mr. Speaker, among the rights and privileges of elected members, one of the first is to be treated as equal. That is why I say, in conclusion, that the hon. Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) has ignored the Official Languages Act and has ignored the rights and privileges of members. He prevented me from discharging my responsibilities as I had committed myself to do in front of my constituents. Once again, I repeat that he has denied me the opportunity to read this document in my mother tongue, which is indeed one of the official languages in this country, while all members who read the other official language will be able to discharge themselves of their responsibilities. Is this a demonstration of equal rights and privileges of all members in this new government?

According to information supplied by officials from the Department of Agriculture, this document is not going to be translated into French for another five or six months. Therefore, I feel that my rights and privileges as a member have been violated by the hon. minister's action. Mr. Speaker, in light of the facts I have just presented, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Argenteuil (Mr. Gourd):

That the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) be asked to appear before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections so that it be ordered that the said report be withdrawn and not made available to anyone until all hon. members can get it in either of the two official languages.

● (1520)

[English]

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I regret I did not have notice of the hon. member's intention to raise this point of privilege, but in response let me say that I think part of it is utter nonsense. The latter part did, indeed, make a great deal of common sense. In the first part I think he is trying to make a mountain out of a molehill.

With reference to the latter charge, I certainly want to take that very seriously. I provided a full explanation to the members of the standing committee last week, and I would be happy to appear before that committee again, or any other committee of the House as far as that is concerned.

In the first part of his charge he indicated that he would not want us to consult with the beef industry. Of course, we want to consult with industry prior to bringing forth pieces of legislation. That is the position we have taken. It is a commitment we have given and a commitment that we intend, indeed, to fulfil.

With reference to releasing the report, I should make it very clear to the House that if this was referred to in the press release as a report, quite openly that is not a correct reference.

An hon. Member: It was referred to as a report.