

*Statistics Act*

tics Canada because they are so wildly inaccurate. I assume that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration talks to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Chrétien) and that they do not keep these kinds of juicy bits of information from each other. I know that the parliamentary secretary, in computing his own LIP program, would not for a moment rely on Statistics Canada information with respect to unemployment in his constituency. If he did, he would not be sitting in his seat very comfortably for very long. The list is long, Mr. Speaker.

I must make a confession here. I may not be able to get off Parliament Hill this evening, because I can think of at least two instances where apparently I broke the law.

I treat this particular move by the hon. member for Kingston and The Islands as a very modest move indeed. What it does is to try to bring modern law to some point of sanity. For the parliamentary secretary to treat this as being superficially innocent is for him to engage in some new form of misdirection which is surely beneath both his capability and his responsibility.

When I first established my constituency office in my constituency of Egmont, I recall that for some reason known only to the forces at Statistics Canada we were suddenly on their mailing list to provide monthly employment surveys about, "our industry". This mystified my constituency secretary, who was a direct employee of the constituency office, because we were not operating any major commercial enterprise. Yet faithfully, month after month, Statistics Canada would send this form letter to the Egmont office, company, or what have you, asking us to give them the following information: "How many employees have you on your payroll? What were the transactions during the past month?"

My secretary, being a very responsible sort of person, asked me what she was going to do about this. So I said; "Do with it what you do with all the rest of the junk mail that comes in—throw it in the wastepaper basket". I can see I was encouraging my secretary to break the law, but I thought it would be much better to break the law in this instance than to return forms which would be absolutely useless to whomever was the anonymous official at Statistics Canada who was circulating this kind of monthly questionnaire which had no relevance to my constituency office in the constituency of Egmont.

Because of the kind of society we have today, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that we need a thorough overhaul of much of the methodology that is used in gathering statistics. A classic example of this occurred during the last major census in 1971. Hon. members will recall that the census was to take place during the month of June. During that month all of the census gatherers were sent out across the country. Now, Mr. Speaker, it so happens that during that month of June I and my family moved from Ottawa to Prince Edward Island, as we normally do. Before we left we had a visit from a person from Statistics Canada who asked us dutifully to fill out the form she supplied, which we subsequently did. Then a few days later when we arrived in P.E.I. we were visited by the local statistics gatherer for census Canada in P.E.I. and were again asked to

complete the form. When I protested and said I had already completed one in Ottawa and thought it would be a little redundant if we became statistical reportees for the province of Prince Edward Island, she told us in no uncertain terms that it was an absolute requirement, that we were residents of Prince Edward Island and that we should file a full return for the five of us living on P.E.I. This we again dutifully did.

If that kind of rigidity, and the kind of rigidity expressed today by the parliamentary secretary, are what we are up against, Mr. Speaker, then the hon. member for Kingston and The Islands has merely touched the tip of the iceberg. We have a much more serious problem than any of us realize. I have some belief that this may well be the case.

A few years ago, Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat disturbed, when attempting to grapple with a good, sound statistical base for the Atlantic provinces in order to deal with our ongoing problems of economic and social disparity, to realize that so much of the information that we required was not available to us because so far we had not updated our social and economic fact gathering sufficiently to give us a much clearer picture of the chronic and structural problems facing the Atlantic region.

It is one thing for individual members to be faced with a series of forms which do not add anything worth-while to the over-all statistical base of the country. But it is another thing not to be conscious of the fact that without good statistical information, as the parliamentary secretary suggested, we would not be able to do our job effectively as parliamentarians and legislators.

It seems to me that if the only response is that we provide criminal penalties for those who do not respond to questionnaires presented to individuals, then the department, or this particular agency of government, is in a very serious state indeed. I believe that we are faced with a situation in which it is not a question of whether or not the department has means of harassing people. I fail to be convinced by the argument that the parliamentary secretary brought forward when he said that there would be a very serious impact on response rates. I have to ask the parliamentary secretary in all seriousness, what kind of documentation, what kind of support, does he give for that? It seems to me that the response rates are going to be determined in almost all cases by the willingness of the individual to provide information which he knows is in the best interests not only of himself but of his community, province, and country.

Surely if the only argument that Statistics Canada has with respect to the information that is going to be gathered, is that if you do not provide the information you are going to be breaking the law, and you will be subject to the laying of criminal charges, then Statistics Canada will become poverty stricken in its approach to people and in the services that it provides to Canadians. Therefore I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that what has been said by the parliamentary secretary this afternoon are the ill-considered remarks of some PR flack in StatsCan and not the thoughtful response of the hon. member or, I would hope, of a minister who believes it is in the best interests of this country to have a Statistics Canada branch