

Privilege—Mr. Clark

Supply and Services has used his power as the new minister to squelch the meeting by simply intervening with the chairman of the committee and saying to him, "I do not want to appear before your committee."

Consider the position in which that is putting all members of the House, including members of the minister's own governing party. In effect, we have been relegated to an inconsequential role. We were not given an opportunity to put questions to the minister with respect to Statistics Canada in committee. Apparently the minister had said that he thought it would be a month before he would be ready to come before the committee. In all likelihood this House might not even be sitting a month from now. My point is that some very serious questions are coming up with regard to Statistics Canada.

I have referred to the reports. As we know, a census will be taken in 1981, before which 33,000 census representatives, 1,800 enumerators and 1,900 commissioners will be appointed. This is something on which there has been considerable discussion. The tradition of the Liberal party has been to follow strictly a governing party approach in appointing those people. We have criticized this in the past and we believe that this is an antiquated system. We are much more in favour of having a completely open system where community organizations and manpower offices can be asked to supply names, as well as all members of Parliament, instead of treating this just as a convenient pork barrel or patronage type of appointment system.

That is why I say that I believe the right hon. Leader of the Opposition has an extremely vital point of order at stake here. We were denied the privilege of knowing in the usual way when the role of a minister has been changed, and I think the House deserves an explanation.

● (1520)

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the discussion on the point of order raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark) who seems to find mystery in the fact that the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) decided to transfer the responsibility for Statistics Canada from one minister to another. There is absolutely nothing mysterious in that and I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition and the former president of the treasury board (Mr. Stevens) will have every opportunity to put appropriate questions both to the Prime Minister here in the House because there will be other question periods and in committee to the new minister responsible.

I heard the former president of the treasury board say this is unfortunate but he thinks the minister will not be able to go before the committee before a month and in a month we will probably not be here. I cannot confirm whether or not we will be here in a month but what I want to confirm however is that under an agreement made with his own parliamentary leader,

the estimates are before the committees until December 10, and the House will be sitting well before December 10. The minister will have every opportunity to answer all the questions of the former president of the treasury board and dissipate the sort of mystery that seems to be blinding the former prime minister.

So there is absolutely nothing irregular in the decision of the Prime Minister. The hon. member for Laurier (Mr. Berger) earlier put a question to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston). The President of the Treasury Board told him it was the Prime Minister who had made that decision, and the question period had expired. An hon. member on the other side tried to get the floor but it was past three o'clock and instead of putting a supplementary question, he came back on the point of order raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition to make his point.

All that makes an interesting discussion, of course, Madam Speaker. It is a point of clarification. We know the House will have other question periods. The Prime Minister will probably be here tomorrow, and the Leader of the Official Opposition will probably also be able to put the question to him. There is nothing mysterious in that. The Prime Minister will give an answer and the former president of the treasury board will have every opportunity to question fully the minister now responsible for Statistics Canada before the committee as the estimates will be there at least at the latest until December 10. Once again, Madam Speaker, I find this question of privilege is being somewhat abused. There is absolutely nothing mysterious, everything is in order, and the facts can be put again before the House either during question period tomorrow or in committee later on.

Madam Speaker: I think the House appreciates the point of order raised by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) but I have to point out right at the outset that I cannot rule on anything that happened during a sitting of a committee. If hon. members have grievances to express concerning proceedings in a committee, the matter has to be debated by that committee and not in the House.

However, a part of the speech of the right hon. Leader of the Opposition is based on the proceedings during the oral question period and having listened to what he had to say, I must say that his grievance seems to me to be quite legitimate, but I must remind him that the whole question of allocating responsibilities within the cabinet is incumbent upon the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself and that the Chair cannot in any way interfere in order to make one minister or another answer given questions. Again I wish to assure all hon. members that when in doubt they can always ask the question directly to the Prime Minister who will answer it himself or tell the House which minister is responsible and should answer in his place.

I think it is now clear to all hon. members that the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Blais) is the one to whom all