

Privilege—Mr. McKinnon

Ontario government officials to try to find out whether iron ore pellets could be sent to some other steel mill in Canada.

* * *

STATISTICS ACT**RESPONSES TO STATSCAN SURVEYS—REQUEST PENALTY CLAUSES BE REMOVED FROM LEGISLATION**

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, who has now indicated that in one case he will allow Canadians who do not want to answer requests from Statistics Canada to be, in his words, dropped from the list. Is that policy going to be applied generally and, if so, why does the minister not agree to remove the penalty clauses from the law?

Hon. Jack H. Horner (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I dealt with that question earlier. Dealing with family expenditures, and noting the sensitivity which was expressed in the House, I spoke to the chief statistician and suggested that he might find it easier not to press charges in those cases where people were refusing to answer sensitive questions. He assured me that he was getting a very good response, practically 80 per cent or better, and in those situations where there is an 80 per cent response accuracy can be maintained.

However, if the penalty clause was dropped completely, I feel sure that the rate of response would drop down substantially below 80 per cent and then statistical inaccuracies would begin to appear.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, is it, then, the position of the minister and the Government of Canada that officials of the Government of Canada are supposed to enforce the law only when enforcement of the law suits the minister?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the law is to be enforced. It is necessary that Statistics Canada statistics be accurate, and I have said that we will be putting before parliament a proposed change in the law so that statistics can be collected voluntarily when we want such statistics collected. In some instances the result of collecting statistics on a voluntary basis might be beneficial, but if we dealt with all statistics on that basis there would be substantial erosion with regard to accuracy.

* * *

PRIVILEGE**MR. MCKINNON—VARIANCE IN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I rise to inform the Chair that I have not yet had sufficient time to prepare my reply to the remarks of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Danson) concerning a question of privilege I raised last week. I expect to be prepared by tomorrow at 3

[Mr. Horner.]

p.m. or any succeeding day, provided, of course, that the minister is in the House.

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I think my schedule calls for me to be in Toronto tomorrow, but I expect to be here on Wednesday, if that will save this business of "After you, Alphonse", waiting for the other to come back from wherever he has been.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The next time the two hon. members are in the House together, that question will proceed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

MARITIME ENERGY CORPORATION**TABLING OF MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, under the appropriate Standing Order I wish to table, in both official languages, two copies of a memorandum of understanding between Canada and New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, signed by the premiers of the three provinces and myself, on the Maritime Energy Corporation, effective February 16.

* * *

MAIN ESTIMATES 1979-80**EXPLANATORY STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD**

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 1980, was presented by the Hon. Judd Buchanan (President of the Treasury Board) and read by Mr. Speaker to the House.

Hon. Judd Buchanan (President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the main estimates I am tabling today tell a story of determination, achievement and restraint.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Buchanan: They transform the announced economic intentions of last summer into irrefutable reality today.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Buchanan: For these reasons I feel privileged to have the honour to table before hon. members the spending plans of this government for the fiscal year 1979-80. These estimates mark the fourth consecutive year in which the government has announced in advance its spending targets for the ensuing year. In each and every year we have kept our spending within those announced target growth figures. When the public