

NATIONAL TRAINING ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

Hon. Yvon Pinard (for the Minister of Employment and Immigration) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-115, to establish a national program for occupational training.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. CHRÉTIEN—ALLEGED IMPROPRIETY RESPECTING DOCUMENT FILED WITH SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, I wish to rise on a matter of personal privilege at this point, because with respect to the member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), you said there was no case for a question of privilege. On the other hand, the hon. members for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) and St. John's West stated several times in the House that the Minister of Justice of Canada had done a specific thing, and I am not referring to what happened at the Supreme Court. I feel that my privileges were breached because I was accused of doing something which I did not do. They accused the Minister of Justice, and not the Supreme Court. Therefore, my personal privileges as a senior government official and a member of this House have been breached by the member for Yukon and the member for St. John's West.

And since the charge that there was some negligence on my part has no basis in fact, I feel, Madam Speaker, that my privileges have been breached and that the hon. members who made the charge should apologize, because they wanted to create the impression, with great fanfare, that I had made a mistake on behalf of the government. So I called the Supreme Court on the telephone, and the Registrar of the Supreme Court informed my deputy minister that the only document the government had filed was the order in council, and that if another document was put in the file, this was done by an official who made a mistake at the Supreme Court. So instead of accusing me of not having done a good job, I feel that if the opposition members have any feeling for the honour and dignity of this House, they will admit that they made a mistake. I do not accuse them of doing so deliberately. If they had inquired at the Supreme Court, they would have found out the reason. However, there are rules and sometimes mistakes are made or things are said, not always deliberately, but if the member for St. John's West or the member for Yukon had been more thorough, they would have tried to find out exactly who filed the document before accusing the Minister of Justice.

That is why I feel they breached my privileges as a member of this House and a member of the government. The document

Privilege—Mr. Chrétien

was filed by the Clerk of the Privy Council, as is customary, and not by the Department of Justice on the instructions of the Minister of Justice. No press release was put in the file by the Government of Canada. So, in view of these facts, I demand that the member for Yukon withdraw his accusation and that he agree—if he refuses to take me at my word, what can I do? I asked my deputy minister, Mr. Roger Tassé, to get in touch with Mr. Hofley at the Supreme Court, and Mr. Hofley confirmed that the only document filed was mine, namely, the order in council, and that we did not file a press release. So I would ask the opposition members to withdraw their charges and apologize.

[English]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, the minister has a very weird idea of ministerial responsibility. He is responsible for the actions of his deputy minister and all public employees in the Department of Justice.

Mr. Peterson: But not those of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Nielsen: He is asking us to believe that the Supreme Court of Canada somehow manufactures press releases on the letterhead of the Department of Justice about a filing.

Mr. Chrétien: How ridiculous can you be?

Mr. Nielsen: He is asking us to believe that that press release on the stationery of the Department of Justice somehow magically found its way into the hands of a clerk of the Supreme Court of Canada who then made a mistake. I am willing to accept that a clerk of the Supreme Court may have made a mistake, but let the minister not ask us to believe anything other than it was an official of his department or counsel retained by his department who transported that departmental press release to the Supreme Court of Canada where it was accepted. Otherwise it would not bear the stamp of the Supreme Court of Canada dated May 20, which it does, and it would not bear the docket number. That is, the press release has on it the Supreme Court stamp and the docket number. The only way that press release could have got there would have been on the minister's instructions.

● (1230)

Mr. Chrétien: You accused me of filing it.

Mr. Nielsen: It has been filed. It has been filed either at the direction of the minister's department or by the neglect of the minister or his department officials. It found its way on to the docket and it is on the docket very, very improperly.

I am willing to accept it if the minister tells me that there has been an admission by the Registrar of the Supreme Court that a mistake was made at their end; but I am also suggesting to the minister that there was a mistake made at his end for that press release, which is entirely government propaganda,