

Statistics Canada

NDP. Any changes I made were simply of a non-substantial nature. I referred to the terms of reference and read them into the record because, as the hon. member knows, in the document delivered to him it was proposed that those terms of reference be tabled. Unfortunately, for technical reasons, the French version was not available in time. I thought that rather than delay the tabling until tomorrow, I should read it into the record, which I did.

Mr. Breau: In French?

Mr. Rae: I can assure Mr. Speaker that any righteousness or any righteous indignation which I feel is completely justified, even with the explanation we have just had by the President of Treasury Board. I do not see any reason why we should be expected to respond on 45 minutes' notice to a major statement concerning Statistics Canada, and then find, even as the minister is reading his statement, that the guts of what he has to say with respect to the terms of reference are missing from the heart of the report for what he calls technical reasons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens) that translation matters are not technical matters. They relate basically to the attitude of the government towards bilingualism and the principles of bilingualism, and it is not good enough for the President of the Treasury Board to come and tell us that he is not in a position to give us a full report of what he is going to say, suggesting he is unable to do so for reasons of translation. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that it is an intolerable attitude as far as opposition parties are concerned. It is not good enough for the minister to hide behind technical problems of translation and tell us there was not enough time. I would say to the minister that if it is a question of time, then let us take the necessary time to have them translated and to do everyone the same courtesy.

[*English*]

Dealing with the substance of the report, the one thing I would say to the President of Treasury Board is that there is a certain irony in the presentation of the report itself. On the one hand, he said that he has complete confidence in Statistics Canada and that he does not want there to be any morale problems. Then he announced not one commission into the condition of Statistics Canada but three. Rather than having appointed three, the minister would have been far wiser to have appointed one commission, the membership of which could be drawn from the areas of expertise that he has outlined.

We are quite prepared to recognize the necessity of a major study on all the fronts which he suggested. I see the minister is shaking his head. As usual he is "so willing" to accept suggestions coming from the other side! I would suggest to him that not only will there be problems of morale which will be devastating as a result of the establishment of these three commissions, but the very real danger that what is not solved before one commission then will become a problem for another

commission, and that what is evidence before one commission will become second-hand evidence before yet another commission. Also there is the potential of conflicting reports among the three different commissions. I would suggest to the minister, with all respect, that it may well cause very significant personnel and other problems in the future.

I suggest to the minister that that, coupled with the attitude and the reputation of this government with respect to its public servants and the attacks which the minister himself launched on Statistics Canada while he was in opposition, does not bode well for the future of Statistics Canada. We in my party are in full support of the notion that there should be a commission of inquiry armed with the necessary expertise to deal with the technical matters concerning the technical and statistical techniques used by Statistics Canada. We think that there is need for a commission which will take into account the problems of morale, personnel and general management orientation of Statistics Canada. We are prepared to recognize that. However, we are deeply concerned that this government has chosen to throw not only one commission into Statistics Canada but three. We are deeply concerned about the possibilities of conflicting terms of reference among them.

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Finally, we must say to the minister that we have some concern as to the protection of the independence, the integrity and the ability not only of Statistics Canada but of all the personnel of Statistics Canada to withstand the onslaught of not one but three inquiries.

That having been said, we support the notion that there should be a commission of inquiry. I hope I am not correct and that my fears are not borne out by events, but I suggest to the minister that by setting up three separate commissions of inquiry into Statistics Canada he is asking for trouble. Had he established one, it seems to me it would have been possible to have assured members of Statistics Canada that there was not a witch hunt going on but that this was a serious inquiry which had a good deal of good intention behind it. I think there is some ground for concern on the part of employees at Statistics Canada who will ask themselves what are the real intentions of the government.

I do not give the minister a C minus, I give him a failing mark for having failed to show us the minimum courtesy of giving us the terms of reference of the Price Waterhouse study which, as the minister knows, goes to the guts of this inquiry. Quite frankly, we have some real concern about the necessity of having three commissions in relation to Statistics Canada when the minister said at the outset that he has full confidence in Statistics Canada as it now stands. If the minister has full confidence, why should he have three commissions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The spokesmen for all parties have been heard, but as before, I am ready this afternoon to allow questions to be put to the minister. I will begin the questioning with the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Roy).