

Mr. Speaker: The introduction of such a motion for debate at this time can only be done with unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

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EMPLOYMENT

ALLEGED ARBITRARY ACTION BY CANADA EMPLOYMENT OFFICE TO DETRIMENT OF NOVA SCOTIA WOODCUTTERS— MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. Andy Hogan (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, although this resolution, on the surface, would seem to be a regional issue, I am sure you will agree that it has national implications and is of urgent and pressing necessity.

For the past two weeks or so, pulpwood cutters from the East Richmond section of my constituency have been receiving notices from the Canada Employment office located in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia, telling them to immediately return to work regardless of weather conditions, transportation difficulties or the rates of pay which they will receive.

All this has occurred in view of the fact that the windchill factor in that area recently dropped to 48 degrees below zero for some days and in view of the fact that in the past these poorly paid woodcutters did not even have qualified scalers and were not required by UIC and Manpower officials to return to work until late spring. I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes):

That the Minister of Employment and Immigration immediately notify these and other officials acting in such an arbitrary and coercive way to cease and desist from such action.

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the introduction of such a motion for debate at this time?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

● (1415)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

STATISTICS CANADA

PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY CANADIANS

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, I have a question to direct to the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the inviolability and the confidentiality of statistical information which Canadians supply to their government.

Oral Questions

In view of the voluble assurances given last week by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce about the confidentiality and integrity of Statistics Canada, could the Deputy Prime Minister assure the House and the country that Statistics Canada does take care of and protect the very personal information that is supplied by the people of Canada to their government?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, in reply to the hon. member's question, I have not made any personal investigation into the matter. I cannot provide the assurance based upon my own knowledge or research, but I will check into the matter and provide the hon. member with whatever assurance can be made at a later time.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I respect the Deputy Prime Minister's attitude. As a parliamentarian of long experience, would he agree with me that the condition under which income tax returns are made available to the chief statistician, pursuant to section 23 of the Statistics Act, are very specific and imply cabinet responsibility? Section 23 (1) (a) of the Statistics Act reads in part as follows:

—in such manner and at such times as the governor in council may prescribe upon the recommendation of the minister and the Minister of National Revenue.

Would my hon. friend agree that there is a certain amount of cabinet responsibility involved in protecting this very important income tax and other statistical information that the government requires from the people of this country?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, of course I agree there is a responsibility to protect the confidentiality of information provided to the government, particularly the confidentiality that is prescribed by law. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that the law will be carried out.

Mr. MacKay: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I want to bring a very serious matter to the attention of the Deputy Prime Minister and ask what he will do to remedy the fact that thousands of confidential forms, including income tax returns, are lying unattended in cardboard boxes in circumstances where people can walk in off the street and have access to them. This situation has existed for months; it is still occurring. Will the minister, once he has satisfied himself that this information is correct, consider an inquiry into Statistics Canada of the type I requested two years ago?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I will take the hon. member's representations seriously. I have absolutely no personal knowledge about the existence of all these cardboard boxes. I have not made any personal tour of the buildings, as the hon. member may have done, but I shall take his representations seriously and make inquiries.