

REQUEST FOR RESOLUTION OF ALL ISSUES

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same Minister who is familiarizing himself with the issues in the matter of redress for the great wrong which Japanese Canadians suffered. I ask him, under the eyes of many Japanese Canadians, whether he will ensure that there are discussions and decisions taken on all matters of a non-monetary nature which have never been resolved to ensure that those components of redress will be resolved. Will he also seek authority to agree to individual compensation which is absolutely essential to a just redress acceptable to the Japanese Canadian community of Canada?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my thanks to the Member and the other members of his Party for their support in trying to reach a solution to a very difficult issue. Forty years has been too long to wait for some acknowledgment of the injustices which have been suffered by Japanese Canadians.

As I have said, I have committed myself, with an open door, to continue to meet, to listen, and to explore all ways in which this situation can once and for all be put to bed.

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PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED REFLECTION OF WITNESSES BY COMMITTEE

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege as a western Member of Parliament deeply concerned about the way the legislative committee is handling Bill C-113, the Bill on western diversification.

I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that when this House gave second reading to Bill C-103 to establish the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Members of the House of Commons and the Government took it very seriously. A legislative committee was struck and it asked permission to travel because of the importance of this particular issue in Atlantic Canada and the obvious need for people living in Atlantic Canada representing individuals, groups, and various agencies, to express their reactions to the legislation as easily as possible.

Therefore, the committee decided to travel. It visited St. John's, Charlottetown, Port Hawkesbury, Halifax, and Fredericton. It held open public meetings so that all people of Atlantic Canada would have access to the process as the legislative committee proceeded with its work.

The committee saw, in a formal way, 35 witnesses including representatives from labour, business, women's groups, academic groups, co-ops—

Mr. Speaker: The committee may well have done all of that but, as I understood the Hon. Member, he was raising a point

Privilege—Mr. Riis

with respect to another committee and another Bill and I would ask that he bring his comments to a conclusion.

Mr. Riis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a western Member of Parliament I believe it is only right that western Canadians have an opportunity at least to express their views. The committee members have not requested travel to western Canada but have asked that witnesses who represent the interests of western Canadians appear before it. The list of witnesses was not long. I believe a list of less than half a dozen witnesses was offered by the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom) and a similar sized list by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy).

That modest request was rejected. The Conservative Members who form a majority of the legislative committee rejected the request to hear from some witnesses. As a matter of fact, they recently decided to hear no witnesses. Before that final decision on witnesses was made they decided to proceed clause by clause with the legislation.

How can the committee proceed in a thoughtful, business-like way to evaluate the legislation when no witnesses have been invited or heard? As a westerner I find that to be the ultimate affront. We are simply asking—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) has raised a matter which clearly gives him very great concern and may, in fact, give concern to other Members. I have listened very carefully to the Hon. Member and the difficulty the Chair is having is that the decision of which he complains was made by a committee. As Hon. Members know, it is not the place of the Chair to interfere with committee proceedings unless something quite extraordinary took place which would literally amount to an Hon. Member not being able to attend the committee or not being able to carry out any function whatsoever.

The question of what witnesses will be called to committees is one which all of us who have been here for some years know is often a matter of debate within the committee. It is not for the Speaker to say whether the decision the committee has made is a correct one or an incorrect one. I can certainly understand, as other Members probably can, that there is clearly a complaint brought to the floor of the House by the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap.

However, I must say that while I have sympathy with the Hon. Member's position, procedurally I have very great difficulty understanding how the Chair can resolve the issue.

• (1510)

The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) is seeking the floor. I will hear him, but very briefly, in view of my comments.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to interrupt the Hon. Member, but during your comments you said that we would only bring this