

Privilege—Mr. Nystrom

In 1975 the minister of labour named Dean W. D. L. Finn, from the University of British Columbia, to head a one-man commission to investigate health and safety in grain elevators on the British Columbia waterfront. This commission was established following a tragic incident on October 3, 1975, in which five men died in a fire at the Burrard terminal. Dean Finn's report, which the Minister of Labour has had since October 7, details a potentially chummy relationship between some of the grain company management officials and the federal labour inspectors who have failed properly to enforce the law and safety regulations.

In his report, Dean Finn says working conditions in grain elevators are hazardous because the companies are behind the times in controlling explosive grain dust, use of electrical equipment is not up to standard, and they are casual in their use of pesticides. Not only has the government failed to act on the Finn report, but it has failed to act following previous elevator disasters and investigations.

In the House, on April 20, 1977, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) directed a question to the Minister of Labour as follows:

In view of the recent government report on health and safety conditions in the country's grain elevators, which describes working conditions as deplorable at best, will the minister inform the House what action his department will be taking to ensure that the health and safety of Canada's 31,000 grain handlers will be protected?

The Minister of Labour replied:

Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wish to thank the hon. member for his expression of interest in this particular matter. It is a particularly troublesome matter. The department has upgraded its regulations very substantially to require a much higher level of safety and attention to the environment of grain handlers working in this country. We have also appointed a commission headed by Dr. Finn of the University of British Columbia.

The Minister of Labour went on to say that the final report of that commission had not been received. Last Friday, May 6, I pursued the same matter with the Minister of Labour in response to an article which had appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* on the previous Saturday which stated that the Minister of Labour had received the final report. I asked him about that final report and he said:

Dr. Finn's group has been studying the matter. When the report is available we will do what we did in the case of the Cape Breton mines—

I went on to ask him, and I quote from *Hansard* the following:

I would like to ask the minister whether he can confirm that he has now had the report since last October 7, and some of the unions have had it for five months.

The Minister of Labour said:

We do not have the final report. The hon. member may very well be dealing with the reports and findings of Dr. Finn. As he has progressed, naturally he has made his findings available to the parties who are co-operating with him to ensure the highest standards. As these findings and views are made known, it is in the interest of all parties and, I am sure, Dr. Finn's wish, that they receive them in a piecemeal fashion, so to say, so that action can be taken concurrently with the progress of the inquiry.

He went on to say they had not received the final report. Our offices have contacted Dean Finn, who has confirmed that the minister received the final report last October. The minister has either been misleading the House, misinforming the

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House, or he just does not know what goes on in his department. We have also contacted numerous officials in the minister's department and they confirmed that they have had the report since last October, and that the details in the *Vancouver Sun* article which talks about the report being in the hands of the minister last October 7 are accurate. These are officials in the minister's own department.

Given the points I have already raised, that this is a serious health and safety problem and that the minister has had the report for a long time, I have to conclude the minister is misleading the House or he is being very negligent in his duties as Minister of Labour. Mr. Speaker, if you find I have a legitimate point of privilege, I am prepared to move a motion referring the apparent misleading of the House by the Minister of Labour to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I should advise the House and the hon. member that I am pleased to detect the tremendous interest that not only the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) is displaying but also that of the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) in this very serious situation on the west coast.

Of course, this tragedy happened some time ago. We acted with dispatch in having the union and management come together, almost immediately, with respect to the constitution of an inquiry under Dr. Finn and detailing terms of reference so that he could do an adequate job. During all this activity of an urgent nature, undertaken with sincerity not only by myself but my officials and the interested parties concerned, there was no expression of interest shown in the House of Commons by any of the opposition members. Now the question of the report is raised. It is quite true that the interpretation of my remarks could be misleading: I concede that, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the report of Dr. Finn was given to the parties the minute it was ready in its English version so that action could be taken right away.

As I indicated in my answer to the hon. member, it is not a matter you can delay. An official report is a report that is in both official languages and in my hands in that official way. Then I can decide to table it in the House of Commons in the appropriate fashion. That is the only fashion that is appropriate in terms of the official receipt and tabling of the report, when it is ready in both official languages. We did not feel we could wait until the translation was completed. It was in the English language only, and we wanted it in the hands of the parties so that it could be acted upon. That, indeed, happened. I would expect the French version to be completed within a week to ten days.

An hon. Member: Seven months.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): It is a very detailed and technical report. Our translation services have had other reports which require translation. I agree that it sounds like a long time, but there is constant urging to get reports like this put into both official languages. Other priorities had to be