

Privilege—Mr. Rodriguez

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I must say in passing that I am surprised at the resistance expressed by spokesmen of the Liberal party to the extension of democracy in the country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: But let me make it clear to the hon. member who raised the question and to the former minister who should be better informed—

Mr. Breau: Will you do the same thing to the Acadians?

Mr. Clark: What the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has done is extend powers to the limit allowed under present legislation which in fact will extend the capacity for assuming greater responsibility over the affairs of the people of the Yukon, people who on May 22 had an opportunity to cast their votes among parties which had taken different positions on that question. They elected the Minister of Public Works whose position on the question was well known.

If there is to be a further extension of the powers and the movement toward self-government of the people of the Yukon, which in the view of this government there should be, naturally that will involve consultation with the provinces, the people of the Yukon and to the degree necessary it will involve consideration by the House of Commons of any amendments to relevant legislation.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MR. RODRIGUEZ—GRAIN HANDLERS DISPUTE—ANSWER GIVEN BY MINISTER OF LABOUR DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which has to do particularly with the question and the answer given by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Alexander) yesterday afternoon in the House. I asked the minister the following question, as reported at page 28 of *Hansard*:

In view of the fact that the minister injected himself very quickly and expeditiously into the west coast grain handlers dispute, bringing it to a successful conclusion, and in view of the fact that the present grain handlers strike has been going on for five months and has the potential of creating problems for Quebec farmers this winter and for others, is the minister now prepared to insert himself directly into the dispute in an effort to resolve it as successfully as he did the west coast grain handlers strike?

The minister replied as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I want to give the hon. member credit for asking that question, because I am also concerned about the matter. But I want to point out to him that at this very moment the mediator, Mr. Rolland Doucet, is meeting with the parties involved in a private way and having meaningful discussions. Progress is being made. For me to say anything further at this particular time would be unproductive.

I was rather flabbergasted by that response, so I immediately had someone from my leader's office, Mr. Jacques Bélanger, contact the union involved, particularly Mr. André L'Heureux,

[Mr. Watson.]

the vice-president of the CSN representing the workers in this dispute. As a result of that telephone call, the following telegram was received in my leader's office yesterday afternoon at approximately five o'clock. I will read the telegram into the record because it is extremely important to the question of privilege I am raising. It reads as follows:

[*Translation*]

Following your call to my office at 3.30 p.m., I do not understand how the Minister of Labour could have said that we were now discussing or meeting for that purpose, for neither I nor the president of the union nor any union spokesman are meeting the mediators or the National Harbours Board at this time.

Signed: André L'Heureux, vice-president.

[*English*]

It was signed by Mr. André L'Heureux, vice-president. It is very clear from the telegram that those who have the responsibility of representing the workers in this dispute clearly know nothing of the negotiations that the minister said in the House were going on at that moment. Not being satisfied with that, I asked the assistant of the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent) to contact the mediator's office. The mediator's office indicated that it knew nothing about any negotiations or discussions which were going on at that moment or had been planned.

An interesting Canadian Press article appeared in the Thursday, October 11, 1979, edition of the *Gazette*. It quotes the Minister of Labour outside the chamber. I should like to quote from the article as follows:

● (1210)

Alexander said "the full force and effect" of the labour department's mediation and conciliation services have been in motion for weeks in an effort to end the dispute.

In addition, he had met union representatives, heard their case and "indicated that the door's always open." Also, Don Mazankowski, minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, had met union officials.

L'Heureux said Alexander "is certainly misinformed about what his officials are doing in the field."

"They are not very active or dynamic . . . we would have expected them to be present more forcefully," he said, adding that all Mazankowski had done was to send a telegram Tuesday expressing hope that negotiations are going well. The union had asked Mazankowski for help in a September 14 telegram.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the last meaningful contact between the mediator and the parties concerned was on October 4 when Mr. Rolland Doucet, the mediator, presented a proposal for settlement to both the union and management. It is interesting to note that the union accepted the mediator's proposal for settlement, but management rejected that proposal.

This dispute has now gone on for five months. It was interesting to note the speed with which this minister involved himself in the dispute on the west coast when grain handlers were on strike. I think the minister has misled this House. It is not for me to say whether or not it was deliberate, but he repeated what he said again today. I would have to say with all knowledge that he has misled this House again today by the comments he made in response to the question I put, which was the same as I put yesterday.