

Oral Questions

In terms of what measures can be taken, I will take the hon. gentleman's representation seriously.

Mr. Whiteway: Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Postmaster General, who was in his seat a minute ago. Perhaps I can be recognized a little later when he comes back.

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SOCIAL INSURANCE**GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS RESPECTING LIMITING USE OF SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBERS**

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The Prime Minister has written to the de facto leader of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Dennis McDermott, stating categorically that the government has no intention at all of limiting the use of social insurance numbers.

The minister will recall that he gave an undertaking in the House to create an advisory council, one of whose purposes would be to investigate the restriction of social insurance numbers. The fact is that there has been no action in the department in this connection and no action on the part of the advisory council. The minister has either misled the House or has been shot out of the air by the Prime Minister. Would the minister indicate whether he has any intention at all of studying the limitation of social insurance numbers?

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I have not read the letter and I am somewhat suspicious of the interpretation being given to it by the hon. member. I did indicate that under the human rights legislation, my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, had the responsibility of monitoring in so far as the data banks are concerned, and I gave an undertaking that it would be examined by the advisory council—not only the concern which the hon. member has and which I share, but also the negative aspects if we simply pass legislation outlawing the use of social insurance numbers except in the four instances I have indicated.

This is something that warrants study because it will have a severe impact in many areas which will work to the detriment of people who are quite prepared to use their social insurance numbers in the interests of gaining several benefits across the country.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the letter written by the Prime Minister to Mr. McDermott has been widely publicized in the press. The Prime Minister speaks in it approvingly of the extension of the use of social insurance numbers in private industry.

In view of the fact, also, that the Prime Minister, during the 1972 election campaign, said that he foresaw the day in the near future when national identification cards would be used in Canada, I want to know whether we can get a categorical statement from the Minister of Employment and Immigration

[Mr. Blais.]

to the effect that social insurance numbers will not become, in Canada, a single identifying number. There was a commitment from him that he would look into it. He has done nothing. I should like to get that undertaking from him right now, in plain English.

An hon. Member: Or French.

Mr. Cullen: As I indicated, I am somewhat dubious of the interpretation given by the hon. member. He says I did nothing. In fact, I have prepared a brief that I want to present to the advisory council asking them for their view on this subject, and I have indicated that under the human rights legislation there is an ongoing monitoring process being carried out by the Treasury Board, as their responsibility. So something is being done. I did not indicate that I was going to go further than that at this time. I am indicating that there are down-sides as well as up-sides to the use of social insurance numbers.

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POST OFFICE**LIABILITY FOR REGISTERED ITEMS THAT ARE LOST**

Mr. Dean Whiteway (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Postmaster General: it has to do with a paid advertisement in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. On the same day, on the front page of that paper there was a small article entitled "Registered mail! What's that?". In part, the article reads that in the Federal Court of Canada, Judge Louis Marceau ruled that the Post Office was not liable for registered objects that were lost. The ad reads in part:

Proof of mailing and proof of delivery are my security when mailing contracts worth thousands of dollars to the U.S. and Europe. That's why I use registered mail.

In light of that contradiction, would the Postmaster General direct the Post Office to withdraw this obviously dishonest and misleading ad?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that the allegation of the hon. member about the misleading ad is true. I think the ad was done purposely to inform the public about our registered and certified mail. People should know, if they get the information, that there is a limit on the responsibility for a parcel which is registered or certified. So I think the advertising is not misleading; it is straight to the point and we will probably make it appear again.

Mr. Whiteway: My question is directed to the same minister. Would the minister look into the judgment brought down by Judge Marceau in that case and compare it, with regard to the liability of the Post Office in respect of registered mail, with the advertisements put out by the Post Office, to see whether or not these ads are misleading, which on the surface they appear to be?