

*Statistics Canada*

myself, I suggest that it is even more important for that kind of co-operation to be forthcoming.

Having said that, we welcome the fact that the minister has now acceded to the recommendations that this issue be aired. He has been careful, as I would commend him to be and as we would be, not to proceed on the basis that there is guilt before proof, that there is proof that the methodology and the economic information provided by StatsCan is in fact bad or erroneous, but recognizing that it is now in doubt. Most certainly, there is no attempt here to destroy the credibility of StatsCan but rather to maintain it to the maximum degree possible and in fact to restore it in the face of some questions that have been cast upon it.

The information we receive from Statistics Canada is extremely important; it is not just dull statistical data that we are getting here. The minister has indicated the usefulness of that agency in preparing information on the cost price index and all the economic decisions that are taken as a result of that information, such as the indexing of programs, labour relations and negotiations, and a host of very important economic and financial considerations based upon the flow of information. He has mentioned two or three others, and I have mentioned another one, to emphasize the importance of the accuracy of information such as the balance of payments information which we get from time to time stemming from Statistics Canada's collection of information.

I can remember when, a little over a year ago, a trade deficit was reported in one month which the following month was corrected to a trade surplus. I think the present government might have faced this same problem very recently. That is not just an accident or a casual error that can be corrected by some improvement in the arithmetic because speculative investment in the Canadian dollar took place as a result of that information. The dollar went down and corrective action was taken and millions if not billions of dollars were spent as a result of that decision. The correction took place, but that did not change what had occurred as a result of the interpretation of what turned out to be inaccurate or incorrect information. So accurate information is extremely important.

We commend the decision to proceed with this inquiry on the administrative, personnel and management side of that agency and, as we coaxed the minister to do and as he has now done, to move beyond that to look at the methodology of how information is collated, distributed and interpreted. To me this is even more important than the first, although they may in fact be related.

● (1530)

We commend him for the commitment to make this report public. He has sort of hedged a little on making the process or the actual inquiry public, but will make public the final report by the consultants who look at it. Perhaps I can understand why that is done.

Very much depends upon the quality and the reputation of the consultant who is finally selected. I understand that the firm named will do the management consultant analysis on the

[Mr. Andras.]

administrative personnel side. The other side, that is the question of accuracy of the information it conveys to us, is extremely important. I am a little intrigued by the suggestion that the person involved will be an international expert in the field, which of course means foreign. We will delay judgment on that until the minister is in a position to advise us who it might be and what indeed his credentials and reputation are. We will be looking at that very, very closely.

The minister went on to talk about the naming of a commissioner under the Inquiries Act to investigate the allegations regarding Statistics Canada made by Mr. Celovsky. We will accept that guardedly at its face value. The minister said that he did not wish to be misunderstood or to be thought to give undue importance to this additional inquiry which he announced today. I think all of us in the House will want to follow that very closely to ensure that there is no undue pressure brought to bear against anybody who has had the courage to state his mind, even if it is critical of the operations of the agency.

We are glad that we have received from the minister concurrence in the recommendations we have made at this time, which resulted from the stimulation we gave him when we raised the question in the House a few weeks ago. We look forward with a great deal of interest to the results of all the inquiries which he announced today. We hope that he will proceed with dispatch with the naming of somebody to look after the methodology, which I think in the end is the most important aspect of this approach.

**Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood):** Through Mr. Speaker, I want to register a very serious complaint to the President of Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens). Not only did we not receive this document until well into the question period, but we did not receive the document as it was read by the President of Treasury Board. The report which he read—

**Mr. Knowles:** He is not even listening now.

**Mr. Rae:** If he will take the courtesy to listen to what I have to say to him, the report which he read was significantly different from the one presented to me. I see the minister shaking his head. I should like to tell him that it was. The guts of what he read had to do with the terms of reference for the report which Price Waterhouse will make. I have not seen those terms of reference. The minister departed from the text he left with me and took off on the guts of this report to the House concerning the very significant report Price Waterhouse will make on Statistics Canada. If that is respect for all the parties in the House, I think we are in for a very sad and difficult Parliament. Is that the standard of consultation we can now expect from the President of Treasury Board?

**Mr. Breau:** For just a few more months; it will not be very long.

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Let me hasten to assure Parliament and at least to attempt to dispel the righteous indignation which seems to be welling up in the