

Suggested Census Changes

with racial origin, and by the conduct of the government there was confusion with reference to the origin of a citizen. That confusion would lead to only one thing, that those who are interested in compiling data for the information of all Canadians on the complexity and diversity of the Canadian population could not have found it possible to obtain that information by means of the manner in which question 10 had been established.

Then again, there is the very important problem for which the census has been established. The census has been established for the purpose of obtaining information with reference to the diversity of the population, the age, the occupation, the racial origin, the religion, and so forth. That has been the practice since 1891, I am informed, and the position so far as we on this side of the house are concerned was this. We could not understand why it was that this practice which had been in existence since 1891 should be changed at this time. As I said earlier, we would like to study the statement made by the minister now to ascertain just what its effect will be on the representations that have been made, but on the whole there can be no doubt that the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who considered this matter not too serious in the house when questions were put to him earlier—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. member that this statement is a statement of intention, of fact, of action being taken on a subject which has been controversial in the house. We have debated the same point in the course of the budget debate.

I hope that the hon. member, in commenting on the proposed action, will refrain from this kind of controversial or argumentative approach to the announcement that would necessitate or evoke an answer at this time. I say this because this is not a debate on the matter; it is a statement of intention presented to the house, without argument, and it seems to me to be appropriate to comment on it without provocative or controversial language.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Speaker, I am reminded that the Prime Minister has indicated that there would be an opportunity to discuss this on a later occasion—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Ricard: Now that everything is settled.

Mr. Chevrier:—and that opportunity may or may not have to be taken, having regard to the statement which has been made.

[Mr. Chevrier.]

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Where were you on Friday?

Mr. Chevrier: But there is one thing which I think should be brought to the attention of the house, and it is this. It is unfortunate that the minister and the government should have seen fit to rely now on the recommendations of the dominion statistician. If those recommendations had been followed in the first place—they were made quite clear—there would have been no difficulty at all about the matter.

Mr. Balcer: St. Laurent.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): You are criticising Mr. St. Laurent's decision.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member again, but it seems to me he is debating the issue. If he proceeds in that vein it will be very difficult for me to prevent a debate arising at this time. This is not the appropriate time at which the matter may be debated in full, and I would ask the hon. member to leave his remarks at that point.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Speaker, my only purpose in making the statement I did was not only in answer to what was said by the minister, but in answer to interruptions which came from the other side of the house. I think I am entitled to reply to those interruptions.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard no interruptions and hope that they are not part of the record.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, we in this group welcome the statement that has been made by the minister this afternoon. With the hon. member for Laurier, we will study it carefully. It is a fact that because of the original form in which this census questionnaire appeared, certain difficulties have arisen and there have been certain criticisms. We hope that the suggestion made by the minister will in fact solve those difficulties, and that the government's suggestion will be acceptable to all Canadians. We in this group think that the form used in the taking of the census should be such as not to cause conflict and criticism, but that it should be a form to which all Canadians would very readily give their approval.

Mr. Hees: Might I suggest, answering the hon. member for Laurier, that the intention of the government is not to confuse anyone but to clarify the mistake which Mr. St. Laurent and the Liberal government made in 1951.

Some hon. Members: Order.