

Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): I will consider the matter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gleave: Will the minister take it as notice—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I assume the minister has taken it as notice. I also notice the hon. member for Brandon-Souris on a question of privilege.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**REQUEST FOR TABLING OF DOCUMENT AND FOR REINSTATEMENT OF COMMISSIONAIRES**

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege which I wish to address to the right hon. Prime Minister. In view of the possible infringement of privileges of the members of this house, with reference to the document issued by the Clerk of the Privy Council which has been circulated prior to parliament's consideration of Bill C-120, would the right hon. gentleman table that document so we could all peruse it?

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe there was an infringement of the privileges of this house.

Mr. Diefenbaker: There certainly was.

Mr. Trudeau: The document itself was an internal document, and I do not believe it is the usual practice to table such documents. But I repeat that the purport of the document was to suggest that, the bill having been introduced, persons to whom the document was addressed should devote some time to a close analysis of the bill, and give some preliminary thought to its implications.

This, to me, does not seem to be an infringement of the privileges of this house; it is giving to civil servants a copy of a bill which is in the possession of the house and which is a public document, and saying, as is obviously true, that it is the government's intention to proceed with this bill. It is on the order paper, and we want to proceed with it quickly. It is giving people at department level the occasion to do some preliminary planning—no action. That is the purpose of the document.

Mr. Diefenbaker: An invitation to use the axe.

Mr. Nielsen: Since the document has been referred to, and partially interpreted by an employee of the government, does the Prime

Minister not feel that hon. members of this house should also be entitled to peruse the document and assess the interpretation made?

Mr. Trudeau: I do not feel so, mainly for reasons of principle. There is nothing in this particular document that there is any particular reason for withholding. I have it here; it is a short one of four paragraphs. It is an internal direction from one civil servant to another, on the orders of the Prime Minister, telling him to do some preliminary thinking about a bill which is before the house.

An hon. Member: What about action?

Mr. Trudeau: The action will come after we have debated the bill.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Yukon on a point of order?

Mr. Nielsen: On the question of privilege—and there may be a point of order arising, now. I believe our rules require that once a document has been referred to, as it has been, in terms of content, vaguely though the Prime Minister may have done so, it must be tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have no hesitation in ruling that the mere fact a public document has been mentioned does not require, under the rules, that it be tabled. Should a document be quoted from it has, according to our rules, to be tabled, if it is an official document quoted by a cabinet minister. But that is not my understanding of what has been done by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Nielsen: Hon. members will of course accept your ruling, Mr. Speaker, but the Prime Minister has in fact referred to the contents of a public document, and I submit our rules now require it to be tabled.

Mr. Diefenbaker: On that point of order, I recollect at least two occasions during the time I have been here when reference to a document, giving a summary of the contents, or a summary of a portion of the contents, was sufficient to require that the document be tabled. Were it otherwise, we would be in a position whereby a minister could simply interpret what he wanted to—he could give his own version of a direction handed to these various departments, and then refrain from tabling the document in the house. I think Your Honour should reconsider this question, because your decision means that ministers may simply give their own ideas as to the meaning of a document, without the house