

Privilege—Mr. Nielsen

course, false. In the first case, the facts are not as she stated. In the second case, the question is, does the government apply the law as it exists and does it try to bring in better policies, as the ministers have suggested, of working toward a guaranteed income for certain persons, or does it not apply the law? I wonder if the hon. lady is suggesting that we should not apply the law.

Miss MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I now understand why the Prime Minister was the only party leader not in the House on Monday to take part in the debate on women's rights. In light of the report of the Canadian Council on Social Development respecting women and pensions, which shows that single, divorced and widowed women between the ages of 60 and 65 are among the poorest of the poor in Canada, without any access to pensions, without husbands supplying support for them, and in most cases without access to the job market, will he explain by what criteria the government decides that married women in that age bracket are entitled to pensions, while at the same time single or divorced women, who in many cases are worse off, are not entitled to the same benefits?

● (1502)

Mr. Trudeau: The simple answer, of course, is that we do not want to force two people to live on the pension of one person. The course the hon. lady suggests would have the effect of expanding even further Canada's expenditure in the social welfare area. Of course, the government is always prepared to spend more money, particularly on needy cases—

An hon. Member: Like Shaul Eisenberg.

Mr. Trudeau:—but she and her leader have been saying that the government has been spending too much. She has to make up her mind what her policy is.

Miss MacDonald: Would the Prime Minister personally undertake to read the letters from single women, widowed women, divorced women in the age group 60 to 65, detailing the hardship under which they are living at the present time because of the policy of the government—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought I had extended a lot of leeway to the hon. lady in her first two questions, but now she has gone a bit too far.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. NIELSEN—APPLICABILITY OF OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Speaker: Discussions have been held concerning the motion put forward a day or two ago by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). Preliminary to any resolution of that problem, of course, would have to be the reconstitution of the Committee on Rights and Immunities which may take place at a later time. It is not, therefore, opportune for me to comment on that aspect now. I would only want to wait to see whether

[Mr. Trudeau.]

that committee is reconstituted. There have been some discussions about the possibility. I can, however, without prejudice, inform the House that, as I undertook, I have entered into some conversations with members of that committee, not with all of them, but with the majority of them, and have determined that there is a consensus among the members of that committee that the subject raised by the hon. member for Yukon could be canvassed very usefully by that committee in an effort to come back with a report quite soon.

As hon. members are aware, that committee has met in the past and has reported to the House on one matter affecting rights and immunities, and would be quite pleased to discuss other matters, particularly to discuss the subject of rights and immunities on a priority basis as they are affected by the Official Secrets Act, and attempt to analyze the position of a member in the face of that Act when there is confidential information in possession of a member, and also, if possible, to canvass and examine the matter of a privileged source of information if, in fact, it does exist, and, if it does, to try to define it and determine whether or not in fact there is any legal authority or precedent for the existence of such a right in the hands of an elected person as there is in the case of lawyers who receive confidential or privileged information.

I should stress that in the past the committee has functioned in a format which is conducive to this kind of work and that it would wish to continue to do so, so it would not be the kind of meeting which would lead to the taking of testimony or the examination of an individual grievance. Rather, it would be a study of the general subject raised by the hon. member in the hope of producing some consensus which would be worthy of report to the House, possibly before the Easter recess. If the committee is reconstituted, and if there is a consensus in the House, it would be my hope that we could begin work right away and, if so, it would not be necessary to pursue to the end the procedural regularity of the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Yukon.

Mr. Rodriguez: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: I wonder if the hon. member for Nickel Belt would permit me to make an announcement before we take up his question of privilege, about which he has given me due notice and which relates to previous notices he has given me?

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF PRESIDENT OF EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMISSION

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of all hon. members at this time to the presence in our gallery of a very distinguished visitor in the person of the Right Hon. Roy Harris Jenkins, President of the European Economic Commission.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!