

Mr. Garneau: Mr. Speaker, if I understand Prime Minister's comments correctly, he is proceeding with the review of the equalization formula that was undertaken by the previous Government. Incidentally, could the Prime Minister inform the House whether the figure I was given in an "off the record" conversation, according to which Quebec would lose 229 million in 1985-86 if the formula is not revised, is correct?

Mr. Mulroney: Yes, Mr. Speaker, provided my hon. friend identifies his "off the record" source. In fact, we have started negotiations with the Government of Manitoba. The Hon. Minister of Finance will be meeting with other provincial counterparts in the near future, and we shall try to find an equitable formula in this respect.

[English]

ALLEGED TAPING OF MEETING BETWEEN FEDERAL AND
PROVINCIAL MINISTERS

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It relates to the meeting between the Minister of Finance of Manitoba and the federal Finance Minister. Does the Prime Minister condone the fact that federal government officials taped that meeting between representatives of the federal Government and of the provincial Government?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I want to say to my hon. friend that I was just given an indication that that may have happened, and I can tell him that I can see no circumstances that would justify that.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALLEGED TAPING OF CONVERSATION

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister admit that either the Minister of Finance or his assistant made a very serious mistake, which is completely unforgivable, by secretly taping a conversation between the federal Government's representatives and the representative of a Government of a province?

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): And that is civility?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, without getting into the details, because I have yet to have an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Minister, although I shall later on in the day, I have no hesitation in telling my hon. friend that at any time or in any circumstances the taping of a private conversation without prior approval is unacceptable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

FUTURE CONSULTATIONS

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister tell us, this House, and the representatives of each and every provincial Government, that this occurrence will never happen again, that open and honest consultations and

conversations will from now on not be taped by federal government representatives, and, if it ever happens again, that there will be a request for the Minister to resign?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in invoking an important precept in regard to civil liberties, my hon. friend would not want me to violate another, namely, the presumption of innocence. I have not heard firsthand from any of the participants as to what may or may not have transpired. However, I could tell my hon. friend that I find that kind of conduct in any circumstance to be repugnant and unworthy.

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● (1425)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

BRIEFING OF OPPOSITION CRITICS BY DEPARTMENTAL
OFFICIALS

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister has a personal dictionary in which government aircraft become sacred instruments of travel, and open Governments become closed Governments. My question concerns the role of critics. We critics in the House, both in my Party and the Party to the left, have had access for background briefings to senior officials of Departments. Will the Prime Minister revert to the wonderful days of "closed" government so that we will be able to have those briefings? Or, must we go to "open" government and have to prove exceptional circumstances, as I recall the release, and also have to obtain ministerial approval? If we have to prove exceptional circumstances, could the Prime Minister tell us whether he issued directives to his 39 colleagues as to what criteria should be applied in determining those special circumstances?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend was busy outside the Chamber playing the piano, and was not listening to the answers we have been giving here. It is widely accepted that he is a better piano player than questioner. All the answers in response to the question of my hon. friend have been given many times in the House, most notably during his absence last week.

Mr. Johnston: There are a number of piano players in this caucus. If we could get together with the brass and the wind on that side of the House, we might do well together.

REQUESTS FOR OFF-RECORD BRIEFINGS

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister. Would he assure the House that these "exceptional circumstances" will be applied objectively, whether they be journalists who are friends of the Party, such as Dalton Camp, as opposed to the elite journalists to whom the Secretary of State for External Affairs made reference? Would he agree to