

Oral Questions

● (1150)

THE BUDGET

REVIEW OF PREPARATORY PROCESS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Finance. During the course of the last week, with the unfortunate events surrounding the Minister of Finance, he made some suggestion that he was not happy with the closed atmosphere that surrounds budget making, that he thought it was too secret a process. Could the Minister tell the House whether or not the Government has under review the question of opening up the budget process? If that is being actively considered, in a broad, general way, how is that process envisaged by the Government?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his question. That is a very important aspect of Government structure and parliamentary business. It was as a result of that kind of question and the concern raised by the Hon. Member that, for example, in June last year the then Minister of Finance issued a Green Paper calling for public discussion on this very issue. That suggestion was further developed by the present Minister of Finance, by working with the Canadian Tax Foundation in arranging a symposium on the subject with members of the Foundation, I believe scheduled for June or July. These two specific steps were taken to engage response by the public, with the opportunity for the Government to work with that private response on a very difficult subject.

EXAMINATION BY SPECIAL COMMITTEE

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister will be aware that the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure of the House of Commons indicated as part of its future mandate that reforms relating to the opening up of the budget process would be considered. When the Committee undertakes that kind of investigation, can it be assured of assistance and help by the Minister of Finance, the Minister of State for Finance, other Government colleagues and the Public Service of Canada, in examining this very important procedure that goes right to the heart of the events which occurred last week since budget making is not only a financial but a social policy process?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, of course I cannot speak for the agenda or the timing of Committees of the House, or what will be their work schedules, but I can say to the Hon. Member that the Minister is very concerned about it. There is no question that he will engage all Canadians, as well as Members of Parliament, because of their very constructive concerns about the process. The Minister has indicated—and it is my perception as well—that the time has long come for an examination of the entire process in order to move what I think is an antiquated procedure, into this century.

COMMUNICATIONS

SATELLITE TELEVISION RECEPTION DISHES—OWNERS' DILEMMA

Hon. John M. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Communications. It concerns the reception of television broadcasts via satellites. The Minister has announced a new policy on the Government's approach to this, but there seems to be a gap between the policy announcements of the Minister and the law as it exists. For those individuals and organizations who have satellite receivers in place receiving off satellites, legally according to the Minister's new projected policy, but illegally according to the law as it now exists, are they to take down their receivers and wait for the law to be changed, or will they be allowed to continue to receive according to the Minister's new law? What has to be done to end this confusion?

Hon. Francis Fox (Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, actually there is no confusion. If the Hon. Member reads the policy documents he will see very clearly that we have indeed liberalized individual receptions of satellite signals for individual purposes. Also we have indicated that in months to come the CRTC would be considering applications from present licence holders to increase the range of signals being made available to licensed operations such as cable operations. I can only suggest to the Hon. Member that any of the licensed cable operations in his area that are interested in increasing the number of available signals could make application to the CRTC.

Also I point out that less than a month ago the CRTC brought down a decision increasing the range of television services available to northern communities by modifying the licence issued to the CANCOM operations, allowing them to put on Canadian satellites the three plus one services which are available to other parts of the country. Indeed there have been a number of measures taken, not only the measures indicated in policy documents but ones of a concrete nature which have allowed over the past year an equalization of service opportunities throughout Canada.

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NUCLEAR ARMAMENTS

REQUEST THAT PRIME MINISTER MEDIATE TO SECURE NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREEZE

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister and it has to do with the growing concern of people globally about the nuclear arms race, particularly the proposed testing of the Cruise missile in Canada. Many people do not believe that a further build-up would be any kind of a deterrent. In light of the fact that the Prime Minister has a very good international reputation—it might be as good as any Canadian Prime Minister has ever had; certainly much better than his reputation in Canada—instead of involving Canada further in a nuclear arms build-up in the world, would he offer himself