

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Before calling oral questions, may I make one brief comment. I had assured the House that upon resumption of the sitting after the Easter break I would make a full statement concerning the guidelines which I believe ought to govern the question period. Upon reflection it seems appropriate that, rather than doing that today, I should do it perhaps next Thursday or Friday, and I will do so.

At this time we are entering an experimental stage and operating under a new rule under which the question period is to begin forthwith and stop promptly at three o'clock. I would, therefore, admonish all hon. members to bear in mind three things.

First, as there is to be a fixed cut-off time, oral questions and answers to them ought to be as brief as possible. I refer particularly to preambles. I might say that I am fascinated by the suggestion of a provincial colleague who says that when supplementary questions are allowed they ought not to be preceded by any preamble whatsoever. That suggestion could perhaps be a guideline for us in the future.

Second, points of order and questions of privilege which might be raised during the question period ought to be deferred until after the question period, in order to make sure that the question period, which terminates at three o'clock, is not interrupted in any way, unless it is absolutely necessary.

Finally, motions presented under Standing Order 43 which now precede the question period, and the presentation of which is to stop in any event at 2.15, ought to have connected to them only a brief explanation establishing the urgency and pressing necessity of the matter and not debating the point.

I leave those points on the record for the moment and reiterate that I will make a more complete statement later in the week which, I hope, will form the basis of discussion, perhaps at an early meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, in order to make sure that members on both sides have an opportunity to provide input into what ought to be the guidelines governing the question period.

Mr. Baldwin: And answers should be truthful, too.

● (1410)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

INFLATION—GOVERNMENT INTENTION IN SEEKING CONSENSUS—POSSIBILITY OF REACHING GENERAL UNDERSTANDING BY END OF MAY

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. It arises out of the statement made last week by the Minister of Finance that he hoped by the end of May to have

[Mr. Speaker.]

reached a consensus with various interest groups on how to deal with the economic troubles in the country. As the Prime Minister is in general charge of this program, will he advise whether it is the intention of the government to reach a general understanding by the end of May or is it the intention to have ready by that time a precise and comprehensive inflationary restraint program to be put into effect immediately?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): The former of the two, Mr. Speaker.

INFLATION—POSSIBILITY OF PROPOSALS REGARDING RESTRAINT TO MEETING WITH PROVINCIAL MINISTERS

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): At the ministers of finance meeting on Friday, following the meeting of first ministers, is it the intention of the government to put before them any specific proposals with regard to restraint for their consideration?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance intends being specific, but not too specific. He has to face the general dilemma of informing not only the House, but the provincial premiers of our course of action. At the same time, he will not want to announce the precise directions we want to follow until we are assured the various sectors of the economy are prepared to follow them. That is why he assumed the government will take until about the end of May to hopefully have general agreement on the general guidelines he wants to follow. With reference to the previous question, the more specific we can be by the end of May, the better it will be. However, at this time, the discussions with the various economic groups within the society are along general terms. They are not of an exploratory nature. They are of a suggestive nature.

INFLATION—REQUEST FOR EXPLANATION OF FIRST PHASE IN PROGRAM SEEKING CONSENSUS ON RESTRAINT

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): As the government House leader said a couple of weeks ago that the government was near the end of the first phase of these discussions, I presume the first phase is now finished. Perhaps the Prime Minister, without giving too much away, can tell us in general terms what was the first phase.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the first phase was one of exploration to try to ascertain from the various groups in the economy what they would be prepared to consider as modes of restraint on condition that other people were also prepared to consider restraint. There was no attempt to have anybody give anything away during the exploratory phase, but to know their conditional position. With regard to the present phase, knowing what each party is prepared to do, the various ministers and myself are attempting to reconcile these positions and state a general course which can be followed by others.