

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1450)

REQUEST FOR UNDERTAKING ADVERTISEMENTS WILL NOT CONTRAVENE ADVICE TO MINISTER

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I have a question to direct to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism. This morning on CTV he said this:

I don't think that public funds should be spent by any government unless that campaign reflects a policy approved by Parliament or widely reflecting Parliament.

In view of the processes that we have yet to go through here in this Parliament—that is, the reference itself and ultimately a joint parliamentary committee which, if it means anything at all, means it will be considering possible changes, hardly a situation either approved by Parliament or widely reflected in Parliament—will the minister undertake to the House that while the process is in place before Parliament, whether at this stage, the committee stage or any subsequent stage, there will be no ads that might contravene the principles set forth in the advice that the minister himself received from his own officials?

Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State, Multiculturalism): Madam Speaker, the hon. member has heard me throughout this question period, and I have tried to make myself very clear. I did not say “approved by Parliament”; I said “approved in principle”, and that is clearly what I said.

Some hon. Members: No, no.

Mr. Fleming: If the hon. member looks at the full transcript, he will see it there. If he wants to pick one or two lines, he can do that, but that is what I said yesterday and I was clear on that. If I left out those two words at one point, clearly if the hon. member listened over a period of time or checked any set of transcripts he would find that that was the intention, no matter how much the hon. member shakes his head.

I think it would be irresponsible for me to give any assurance—I am surprised the hon. member would ask for it—but I will do my very best in my role in the cabinet to communicate with the Canadian people on the policies of the Government of Canada, and I have set down the terms under which I will attempt to do that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, one of the problems in this country is the communication of the policies of this government. What I am asking the minister is whether he will undertake to the House not to complicate even further by possible misinformation the problems of the country. Will he undertake that?

Mr. Fleming: First, Madam Speaker, this apparent piousness about something as fundamental as informing the Canadian public, which I think is the responsibility of any government, coming from the opposition House leader after that ridiculous ad run by the Progressive Conservatives a week

ago claiming action we did not take, is fine, and certainly they paid for it and I am glad they did. Because when they talk about being responsible, which is the point I am trying to make, that particular advertising campaign accused the government of a policy that has not been taken by the government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fleming: We are trying to inform the Canadian public about policies that either widely reflect Parliament or indeed have been approved in principle. My hon. friends are either thick skulled or obstinate, because I made it clear throughout this question period that at this time there is no campaign. Yes, there may be a campaign and we will have to determine the circumstances. I know they are the voices of the provinces rather than the voices of the nation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

COST OF LIVING TAX CREDIT AS PROTECTION AGAINST INCREASE IN ENERGY PRICES

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. In one of his few forays into the public realm the minister said, and I quote from a recent speech:

In the next few years, a great deal of purchasing power will be withdrawn from the Canadian economy as energy prices rise.

I should like to ask the minister whether he can give us a firm and solemn commitment that any increase in energy prices will be accompanied by a simultaneous imposition of a cost of living tax credit which will provide compensation for Canadians at the lower end of the scale who can least afford—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: You are a year late; you have already voted against that.

An hon. Member: You moved a motion against that.

Mr. Rae: I stress the word “simultaneous” cost of living tax credit to protect those Canadians who can least afford the energy price rises which appear now to be the deliberate policy of this government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Well, Madam Speaker, the hon. member has asked me to provide a solemn and firm undertaking. Solemnity is not part of my approach to public life and I could not possibly emulate the NDP in the field of solemnity on all occasions. But I will answer the question simply: I