

Oral Questions

In view of the fact that such advance information as to what is to be in the budget could have repercussions on the stock market, could permit some people to make huge sums of money and throw things into a bit of a tizzy, will the Minister of Finance declare categorically that the story in this morning's *The Globe and Mail* is incorrect, that this is not a forecast of his budget of Tuesday night?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): As the hon. member knows, Madam Speaker, prior to every budget there are speculative stories relating to the budget. That happened last December when there were innumerable stories as to what would be in the budget. That has happened on this occasion. I have a long list of newspaper articles containing speculation as to what may or may not be in the budget. That is a normal process and it does not require the Minister of Finance either to confirm or deny the rich, often erroneous, speculation that occurs.

Mr. Knowles: Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that this story lists seriatim at least 15 specific points in very precise terms and very precise detail, will the minister keep this in mind when he brings down his budget and, if there has been a leak, will he take steps to find out how that came about?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, we will not be able to deal with that possibility until after the budget has been delivered. Obviously at that time if there appears to have been any leak, which is a matter quite apart from speculation, action will be taken. However, because the speculation is so diversified and wide-ranging in all newspapers—there is not just the article by Mr. Carruthers; there is a variety of others—it would be difficult for the speculation, in some cases at least, not to be right—for example, the date of the budget.

Mr. Knowles: Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that one of the most important items in Mr. Carruthers' story is to the effect that there is to be an export tax on natural gas and electricity, and in view of the serious nature of this, will the minister deny categorically that he has any intention of imposing such a tax—

An hon. Member: You want to know what is in the budget.

Mr. Knowles: I want the minister to deny that there is a budget leak—particularly when it is in the minister's power, by increasing taxes on the multinationals, which have had a 65 per cent increase in their profits in the last nine months, to get the funds he needs without the offensive tax which Mr. Carruthers says the minister is going to produce?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the same question was raised recently at the meeting of ministers of finance when a number of ministers asked me to forswear at that point the possibility of an export tax. What I will say today is what I told them, namely that it is an option that is available to the Minister of Finance, that it is fully within the constitutional

authority of the Government of Canada to levy such a tax, and it is an option which is being considered at the present time.

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STANDING ORDERS

S.O. 33—REQUEST FOR REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Bob Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, in order that the rights of private members on both sides of this House will not be further offended, and in view of the fact that Standing Order 33 effectively restricts the freedom of speech of duly elected members of Parliament, will the government take steps to remove or to modify the rule by referring it to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections?

● (1140)

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, the suggestion made by the hon. member concerns 1/116 of the kind of reform we would welcome in this institution, because the Standing Orders of this House contain 116 items. On the other hand, I have a suggestion to make. Standing Orders 75A, 75B and 75C when applied are termed as closure by the opposition, but they are really used to limit the debate and to extend it more than a full day if we wish. The hon. member knows full well that these Standing Orders cannot apply to a motion, only to a bill, because they only concern the different stages of a bill. So I suggest it would be a positive step—and I am open to this suggestion if the hon. member wants to make it—to include in Standing Orders 75A, 75B and 75C motions as well as bills. This would have enabled us in this case to allow more than a full day while restricting the debate at this first stage of the constitutional issue. So, according to his suggestion, Madam Speaker, if, on the one hand, we are quite open to parliamentary reform, and I want to indicate to my colleagues that something is forthcoming in this regard, it would also be advisable to consider applying the provisions of Standing Orders 75A, 75B and 75C to a motion in addition to a bill.

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[English]

THE CONSTITUTION

REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE CLOSURE WILL NOT BE REINVOKED

Mr. Bob Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, of course I would welcome any move toward parliamentary reform, and I thank the minister for agreeing to consider such an initiative.

An hon. Member: And respect.

Mr. Wenman: I respect Parliament, my friend, and I hope you do the same.