

Oral Questions

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): That will be soon, Pierre.

REQUEST THAT TWO MINISTERS BE FIRED

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): The Prime Minister dismisses a century of parliamentary tradition—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark:—trying to keep together his tattered and divided cabinet. The Prime Minister will know that in the speech dated January—

Miss Bégin: Twenty-fifth.

Mr. Clark:—twenty-fifth. I thank the Minister of National Health and Welfare in one of her last actions, I trust, if she is a woman of principle in the cabinet.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The Minister of Finance said at that time in a speech, part of which the Prime Minister quoted selectively, and I am quoting the minister:

For all these reasons, I believe that we must resist the temptation to veer away from restraint, whether to gain a temporary and minimal increase in jobs or simply to reap the transitory political benefits.

That was the Minister of Finance's statement on January 25.

We now have both the Minister of State and the Minister of National Health and Welfare veering away from the central policy of the budget, that of restraint, admitting that they cannot compute the cost in millions of dollars of the programs they are recommending in disagreement with the minister. Obviously we have a clear disagreement between what the Minister of Finance has said and what two of his cabinet colleagues have said.

My question to the Prime Minister is very straightforward. Is he going to fire the two ministers who disagree with his Minister of Finance, or is he going to abandon the Minister of Finance and abandon a century's tradition of cabinet solidarity?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): As I said yesterday, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is showing more concern about unity in our government than he is about unity in his own party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: That is the way he has of forgetting his own problems. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that I have heard these ministers in and out of cabinet, I saw them vote on the budget, I saw them supportive of the budget, and I have seen them exercise that role in caucus, in cabinet, and in the House of Commons. That is satisfactory to me.

Now, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to get a great deal of joy out of quoting Laurier, I can understand that because he is one of the great men to whom they should look.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1420)

Mr. Trudeau: I only hope that this line of questioning will continue for quite a while, because I am happy with the situation in my caucus. I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition is not happy with the situation either in his caucus or in our caucus, but let us continue to discuss it. I would like to hear some more quotes from the opposition, preferably from Sir John A. Macdonald this time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

QUERY RESPECTING FREEDOM OF MINISTERS TO DISAGREE ON POLICY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, as the Prime Minister did when he described hon. members of Parliament as nobodies, and as he did when he muzzled this House, he now proposes to joke about the fundamental traditions of our Parliament as he ignores them. Our interest here is not in quoting Laurier; rather, our interest here is to ensure that respect is given to what Laurier stood for and what every Prime Minister before this Prime Minister stood for in terms of cabinet solidarity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I would like to make the very loose standards which the country has come to associate with this Prime Minister exactly clear. Is the Prime Minister now saying that because the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Minister of State, and Lord knows how many other ministers, have written to him disagreeing with his Minister of Finance, and because they once voted for the budget, they are free to disagree with every major thrust the Minister of Finance puts forward? That is what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has done. That is what the Minister of State has done. If that is the standard of the Prime Minister, let him say so; if it is not, let him tell us his standard of cabinet solidarity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, there is a very simple test of cabinet solidarity, and it is the one which Laurier applied. The right hon. member should look at the circumstances described by Laurier in the case he cites. It is that, when a minister disagrees with the cabinet, he resigns from that cabinet.

Mr. Nielsen: Right on!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Or she resigns.

Mr. Trudeau: Or she resigns if she disagrees with the position of the budget or of the government on any particular