

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): I am not able to give any details with regard to the position of OXFAM bearing in mind the secrecy provisions contained in the Act. I cannot make any comment on that matter.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF MINISTER OF BREACHES OF
CONFIDENTIALITY

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Revenue which relates to the state of knowledge of the minister.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: On November 18 the minister was asked by the hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo whether he could tell the House why he, as minister, was not aware of the practice referred to in the broadcast by Messrs. Templeton and Berton. The minister went on to say—and this is where the confusion arises—“I do not accept the statement made by the hon. member in the first place as to whether or not I was aware of it”. What I should like to ask the minister is: What did the minister know about the ease of access to confidential files prior to the broadcast revelations? The question is quite simple—

● (1202)

Mr. Lalonde: “Yes or no”.

Mr. Clark: It is, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Chrétien: You would do better to read your question again!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Mr. Clark: The minister is a little confused, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chrétien: No, you are confused.

Mr. Clark: It is not we who have to read questions, it is the minister who has to read answers. My question is quite simple: What did the minister know?

Hon. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Minister of National Revenue): In spite of the hon. gentleman's long preamble, Mr. Speaker, I have yet to receive a pie in my face.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): In regard to the other part of his question, I must sincerely say that before the program came on the air I did not know anything about the case to which the hon. member is referring, and that is the truth. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman knew something about it before but he failed to let me know.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the minister's memory is short. He knows we have been through this before and he knows he has been proven wrong in connection with that particular allega-

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tion. Knowing he is wrong does not prevent him from repeating it. The minister for once was quite careful. He said he did not know about that particular case before it was brought to the attention of the Canadian people. Our question is: Did he know of the practice? Did he know in advance of that revelation about the ease of access on the part of unauthorized persons to the confidential tax files of Canadians?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): No, Mr. Speaker, I did not know of that practice. If there is such a practice the hon. member would be helpful to me if he divulged the type of practice he knows of. In fact, if anyone is aware of the ease by which one can get information from the department, I should like to know so we can make a better investigation and benefit the Canadian people as such. In fact, sir, it is the hon. member's responsibility to do just that.

Mr. Clark: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I find it curious for ministers of this government to be telling anybody anything about responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

NATURE OF DEPARTMENTAL INVESTIGATION INTO BREACHES
OF CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): So that we might help the minister get to the bottom of this matter, and I am referring to the departmental investigation which the minister says is now underway, will he tell the House of Commons the nature of this departmental investigation? For example, has he requested his public officials to get in touch with major chartered accounting firms across the country? Has he requested his officials to monitor broadcast or other allegations, including those on “As It Happens” and other programs, and to follow up any allegations which might have been made? What is the precise nature of the departmental investigation which the minister has ordered?

Hon. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, the investigation conducted both by my departmental officials and the RCMP is a very good one. We are going into every detail. If I were to start giving the details to the House, I would probably jeopardize the investigation that is taking place. There is no reason why I should make a report at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did indicate over the last 48 hours that I would hear argument today on dollar items. I think we should get to orders of the day first, and then to it at that time.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. WENMAN—READING OF PORNOGRAPHIC POETRY TO
HOUSE

Mr. Bob Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I hope I have not already offended