

Oral Questions

and its privileged access to a few tax people, who are probably friends of the Party, who are allowed to see the paper and seek special advantages for themselves or their firms.

If they are allowed to see the White Paper today, why do Members of this House not have the same privilege? Why should we have to wait until tomorrow to prepare our answer to the Minister when people outside the House have read the paper? Why did the Minister not wait until tomorrow and give the same advantage to all people at the same time? Why this special treatment for your friends?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear. It is not special treatment for my friends. I do not know many of those people.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): I think I know three or four of them. They are technical advisers to the Department of Finance officials. I met with a small group of them on one occasion, but they have been meeting with finance officials on an ongoing basis to provide technical advice, as a sounding board, on a range of alternatives, some of which might be in the White Paper, some of which might not.

The answer to the specific comment that the Hon. Member made is that they have not read the White Paper as a whole.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. It is about the propriety of the situation of which we just learned, that the Minister of Finance has given privileged access to information about his tax White Paper to a group of professionals in the hope of inspiring favourable comment on the tax reform when it is made public in a couple of days.

Is it appropriate in a parliamentary setting that the Prime Minister's Office should have drawn aside groups of journalists from CTV and CBC and other places to try to ensure that they give favourable treatment to the tax White Paper, and that the Minister of Finance should be doing the same? Where does Parliament come in all of this, and why is Parliament not put first?

● (1430)

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, Parliament has been a part of this. Parliament has been involved. I think the Hon. Member himself has been part of briefing sessions—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): —from finance officials on various components of the tax reform. If the Hon. Member is referring to backgrounders which are being given to members of the media, that is exactly the same process, with the possible

exception that the Hon. Member has been getting more detail than the members of the media.

[Translation]

INQUIRY IF IT IS POSSIBLE TO GIVE DETAILS OF WHITE PAPER TO EXPERTS WHILE EXCLUDING PARLIAMENTARIANS

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the Minister of Finance.

In the past few days, the experts, accountants and people in the investment industry have all had the details on tax reform in the White Paper prepared by the Minister of Finance and his department. Meanwhile, Opposition Members have to stay in a lock-up tomorrow until noon to get the details on the tax reform proposals prepared by the Minister of Finance and his department during the last two years.

My question is as follows: Is it fair for the Minister of Finance to give all these details to the experts and try and influence the opinion of professionals, while at the same time excluding parliamentarians from this process?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has got it wrong, all wrong. These experts have taken an oath of secrecy. I do not believe the Hon. Member would submit himself to an oath of secrecy on this particular issue.

This group of experts, a small group of experts, has been asked by the Department of Finance to act as a sounding board for a range of proposals, some of which may be in the White Paper and some of which may not. That is the basis on which they are doing this and it is a practice which has been followed for years and years by the Department of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): That is not true.

Mr. Gauthier: It is not true.

Mr. Crosbie: You are really desperate now. Why don't you get an issue with substance? It is a nightmare to come back and listen to you.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Why don't you go back to Paris and stay there?

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre has the floor.

Mr. Cassidy: Just because it was done by the Liberals doesn't make it right to be done by the Progressive Conservatives.

Ms. Copps: False, false, false.

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON CONSULTATION

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): My question is about the ordinary Canadians who have not been consulted in this