

Oral Questions

sense that it does not, *per se*, take effect the very same day pursuant to a Ways and Means Motion.

I think my hon. friend would agree that there is a world of difference between the White Paper on national defence or a White Paper on tax reform, and a formal Budget which has its own conventions and has acquired its own traditions and requirements over the decades and centuries.

I am asked for a view in regard to what took place with Mr. Lalonde who was presenting a Budget. There was clearly no option. That required the Minister's resignation because that was an impropriety of the highest parliamentary order.

What has taken place here is consultation pursuant to the publication of a White Paper, as happened with the White Paper on defence two weeks ago. Surely my hon. friend would agree that there was nothing improper two weeks ago, and there is really nothing improper today.

CONSULTANTS' ADVANCE ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. I do not see how the Government can get away from the characterization of this White Paper as a document in the nature of a Budget. That is clear from answers given by the Prime Minister today and from answers that the Minister of Finance gave yesterday.

Consultation is fine until the preparation of the final document. However, what precedent is there for giving privileged access of final documents to members of the public before the document is revealed here to Members of Parliament?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this particular question has been answered. It was referred to in the Speaker's ruling. These people have taken an oath under the Official Secrets Act in the course of their work advising on the preparation of the White Paper. That is the substance of the position they have taken.

Mr. Kaplan: Parliamentary tradition is clear that members of the public not be given that type of access whether or not they take oaths.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister claim to rest on long established precedent, what precedent is there for giving members of the public under any circumstances—oath or no oath—privileged access to the contents of the document before the revelation of a Budget here?

An Hon. Member: It is not a Budget.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the former Prime Minister and former Ministers of the Crown would know that in any Government there are

dozens of consultations going on that involve highly sensitive information about which Canadians are invited to assist the Government, pursuant to the Official Secrets Act. There is nothing new in this.

It took place most recently in regard to the White Paper on national defence which was designed to put forward a position paper that Canadians could then debate more fully in public. There were intimate consultations involved in that before.

There is nothing new in this, and the Minister's conduct in this regard has been consistent with tradition and perfectly proper, as one would expect from this Minister of Finance.

QUERY CONCERNING PRECEDENTS

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. I think we all agree that proper consultation on matters such as tax reform is very appropriate. However, I want to indicate to the Prime Minister that this is a White Paper which is government policy by definition, and our information is that it will be accompanied by the tabling of a Ways and Means Motion. It goes far beyond a simple statement of intent by the Government.

The Prime Minister indicated in his response to my Leader that there were all sorts of precedents regarding this matter, where public individuals had access to the final document, whether it was a Budget or a White Paper on taxation to which people from the private sector, not on the payroll of the Department of Finance, had access the day before its tabling in the House of Commons. To what precedent was he referring?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member must realize that there is a wide range of precedents of people being involved in the process leading up to a White Paper. I think this has been the case with previous Governments and certainly has been the case with this Government. That is the basis on which these people have been invited, as part of an ongoing process of advice which started last November and will continue until the completion of the process.

ACCESS TO WHITE PAPER CONTENTS

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister because it was the Prime Minister who indicated that there were many precedents for this particular action by the Government.

We have no quarrel with advice being received leading up to the drafting of a White Paper. The point concerns private sector individuals having access to the White Paper in its final form. The Minister of Finance said no changes would be made.

The Prime Minister indicated that there were many precedents of people seeing the final draft. Will he name one