

Oral Questions

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I think perhaps the hon. member is right. The minister should not have complained about filibustering by the Social Crediters because they are generally absent.

As far as a budget is concerned, I declared several times that I am reviewing the situation and that I shall have a budget when we think the moment is appropriate. I think it would be important to receive the information on the first quarter of 1978 before changing the economic policies announced by the government. It is indeed very surprising that the Conservatives have acquired a new critic for economic matters who said on TV last weekend that I was perfectly right to expect a 5 per cent growth for 1978, while the Leader of the Opposition himself said in Toronto the previous day that nobody would believe my predictions, except for his new recruits.

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the Liberals should feel the need to dispatch a vanguard three months in advance to try and win two ridings, given the rate of inflation and unemployment that prevail in Canada, but the fact remains that a minister accuses the opposition of being absent from the House and upsetting the parliamentary schedule. So I would ask the minister what he intends to do in the field of finance to rectify now our economic situation, so that we can discuss the question right away. Why does he keep deferring the presentation of his budget?

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● (1432)

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MIDDLE EAST—CANADIAN PEACEKEEPING FORCE

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Yesterday he said he expected that within 24 hours things in Lebanon concerning the interim peacekeeping force would be much clearer. Could he tell the House what the situation is today? Have we been asked for troops and, if so, what kind of troops? Have we offered troops and, if so, what kind of troops?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I hope that with your indulgence I can give a brief answer on all those points.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: So do we.

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. member will give me sufficient time, I will be glad to answer as fully as possible. The proposed operation is in two phases. The first is an advance force which would consist of some Swedish and some Austrian troops. In that connection, there has now been a specific request to Canada for some logistic support for that brief operation

[Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue).]

which is likely to take from two weeks to a month. We are examining the proposal in a positive way. The Minister of National Defence, Admiral Falls and I met this morning along with the under-secretary of the department, and we hope we can do something in connection with that particular request.

In terms of phase two of the operation, namely, the establishment of the special force as agreed to by the Security Council, the Secretary General is working on it at the present time. There has not been a request to Canada, and in so far as we have been able to determine it is unlikely that we will be asked to participate in that activity because of the large number of Canadian forces already in the Middle East region. There are approximately 1,100. There is a general feeling that perhaps the burden might be more equitably shared among various countries.

I am glad to say that we learned shortly before lunch today that Norway, for example, has agreed, I believe in principle and perhaps, indeed, has actually committed itself, to the special force. There is some prospect that France may also be prepared to make a contribution. All of this is very welcome to us as it helps to spread the burden of peacekeeping in that troubled area.

Mr. McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Secretary of State for External Affairs for that full answer. On reading *Hansard*, I noticed that he omitted to answer one of my questions yesterday which concerned parliamentary approval for moving troops to new peacekeeping tasks. Would the minister state now that as a matter of principle he agrees with Mr. Pearson's principle that no new commitment of peacekeeping should be taken on without parliamentary approval?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, in principle I do not see that there is any particular difficulty with consulting parliament. I have tried in this particular case to put all the facts before the House. I would think it would have to be examined on an individual basis. If, as in the case with phase one as I outlined it, we are simply agreeing to provide some interim logistical support, I would think it is entirely proper to move on the basis of established policy.

I think I have demonstrated that there is no reluctance on my part to consult with the House through committees, in committee of the whole, or in some other way. As to this particular case, I think it is hypothetical at the moment because, I repeat, there is no request before the government.

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TRANSPORT

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO FACILITATE MOVEMENT OF GRAIN

Mr. Craig Stewart (Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, and not only in that capacity but also in his capacity as Minister of Transport. As grain shipments are very slow off the prairies this year, which means that farmers not only face exceptionally low grain prices but also low quotas, and as most