

*The Budget—Mr. Epp*

**Mr. Epp:** The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) likes to champion causes and create the image that she is always there working for the less fortunate in our society. She said the government would give pensioners \$10 per month more. They will get \$239 this year and \$249 next year. Let us examine that for a moment. These are the people who were our pioneers. These are the people whose salaries almost invariably were substantially lower than salaries earned today—by those of us who have work. They are the people who saved for that time when they would be senior citizens. Is it valid to give them that kind of sleight of hand argument? Is it valid to give them smoke and mirrors and to say that, because it is more, they therefore should not ask for an explanation as to why it would otherwise be less?

The government is asking for confidence. The government wants the economy to start rolling. If that is the goal and that is the sincere aim, I say in all sincerity that the government should tell Canadians the whole story and not hold back that which might not be favourable. Only then will the government gain some credibility.

I also found it interesting that the hon. member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith) blamed the media for the government's problems. He said the media had created a hype. At the time of the Meach Lake experience the government went to the mountain top. I suppose the members of the government wanted to get some revelation—perhaps not equal to the Ten Commandments, but some revelation nonetheless.

**An hon. Member:** Water.

**Mr. Epp:** If they went for water, that would have been better. After Meach Lake the response of members of the government to any questions in the House was, "Wait for Versailles, wait for Versailles." The response was that when the minister returned from Versailles—

**Mr. Smith:** We never said that.

**Mr. Peterson:** Nonsense.

**Mr. Epp:** Was that not said?

**Mr. Peterson:** No. Name one who did.

**Mr. Epp:** I will name one: the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Paproski:** Pierre Trudeau.

**Mr. Epp:** Or the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Peterson:** What did he say?

**Mr. Epp:** Then after Versailles the response was, "Wait for the economic statement", which became a budget. Hon. members opposite can blame the media all they want. Some days I take a certain jaundiced view of the media myself, but let hon. members be honest; they used every one of those events to hold off the inevitable, which came last night in the budget.

How can we turn the economy around? Is it possible? I believe it is because of our potential as a country. Tomorrow

there will be what I suppose I can call a federal-provincial conference. There will be a meeting of the Prime Minister with the ten premiers of the country. The Prime Minister has told them, "We must co-operate." That is true, but when we look at the events of the past 18 months, can we say that the Prime Minister is the best person to preach co-operation in Canadian federalism?

**Mr. Huntington:** He said co-operative federalism is dead.

**Mr. Epp:** I believe in co-operative federalism.

**Mr. Rossi:** You are not the judge of that.

**Mr. Epp:** Fair enough, but the Prime Minister said co-operative federalism is dead.

**Mr. Rossi:** Who are you to judge that?

**Mr. Epp:** I am telling the hon. member what the Prime Minister said. What happened with the EPF? What happened in the constitutional debate? The Prime Minister said co-operative federalism is dead. How can he expect, after one short post-budget meeting tomorrow, that suddenly co-operation will be natural? The Prime Minister himself said today that the energy agreement with Alberta and Saskatchewan took 18 months to achieve. What about the Atlantic offshore problem?

**Mr. Peterson:** What about the budget?

**Mr. Epp:** These are all factors in tomorrow's meeting. Granted, we are in very difficult times and need co-operative federalism, but this Prime Minister is the only Prime Minister in the history of the country who has had such an abysmal record in dealing with the provinces.

**Mr. Rossi:** On account of you guys. On account of you, trouble-makers.

**Mr. Epp:** I note the hon. member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau), who was the chairman of a committee which made a report which was totally annihilated and destroyed by the Minister of Finance, is in the House.

**Mr. Breau:** You haven't read the report.

**Mr. Epp:** If the hon. member for Gloucester wants to speak, he can ask his whip. His whip might even let him speak next year.

**Mr. Breau:** Tomorrow at five o'clock.

**Mr. Epp:** Is there any other factor? I believe that if we return to co-operative federalism, in time confidence can be restored. However, the federal government will have to recognize that the provinces are partners in federalism and that they have a role to play. That role should not simply be to answer a call by the Prime Minister to come to Ottawa 48 hours after the budget to be told, "That is what you will do, or else." The Prime Minister has taken that approach too often.