

Oral Questions

Out of the report last night there was a factual assertion, namely, the claim that the deficit for the coming fiscal year would be \$31.2 billion. The news of that has caused speculation, as has already been referred to, in terms of the Canadian dollar. Does the Prime Minister not realize, that, on the one hand, if the budget appears with that figure in it tonight, the Minister of Finance must resign or, as he seems to be implying, does he not understand in terms of the integrity of the Government, that that figure already having come out and been used, if the Minister of Finance gets to his feet tonight and changes or omits that figure, he has violated a very basic question of trust and, as Minister of Finance, will no longer bear the kind of personal integrity that he needs if a Government is to maintain its respect?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the first leg of that two-legged stool, but on the second leg, the Hon. Member talks about violating a basic question of trust. Is he saying that the Minister of Finance, once having thought of an economic policy and putting it on paper in a first draft, must hereafter never change it like the laws—

Mr. Stevens: First draft?

Mr. Trudeau: First, second, third or tenth—that he is not allowed to change it lest he offend the Opposition and those speculators?

Just a few months ago the Leader of the New Democratic Party was suggesting that we should reduce the deficit. A few days later he was suggesting that we should increase it. That may be wishy-washy economic policy, but it is certainly not a matter of a breach of any trust. It is a matter of him having changed his mind.

In the case of the Minister of Finance, it is well known that he has been working on this budget for the past several months. He has met with groups all across the country. He has had discussions with Members of his own Party, members of the labour unions, industrial leaders and so on. He has been improving his budget all the time. He may have decided to continue improving it between Friday and Monday, and between Monday and Tuesday. We shall see, Madam Speaker.

NORMAL PROCESS OF BUDGET PREPARATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, is the Prime Minister telling the House that the Minister of Finance, who is absent, is busy in his office making some last minute changes to the budget? Is he telling the House that is the normal way of functioning? The lockup that has normally been provided for journalists has been postponed and delayed, maybe for the rest of the day. Will he really admit that what he is trying to do as Prime Minister, instead of living up to his constitutional obligations in such a serious situation, is to get away once again with trying to escape an issue by a mere technicality, redefining what a budget is and insisting on some absurd legalism that, by definition, we only have a budget when it is presented tonight and that what was presented

yesterday to the press and the country, and claimed to be the budget by the Minister of Finance, should be defined out of existence? What he is doing is defining out of existence the very integrity of the Government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is talking of some absurd legalism, as he puts it. Let us look at this legalism to which he refers. He quoted to me before the case of the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Dalton. I put it to him that if between the time when Mr. Dalton had told the reporter that there was going to be a tax on cigarettes and the time when he stood in the House of Commons in Westminster and delivered his budget—if he had changed that and put a tax on chocolates instead—

Mr. Broadbent: He did not change it.

Mr. Trudeau: The Hon. Member tells me he did not change it. I want to know about this legalism. Is he telling me that Dalton, having realized that perhaps he had made an indiscretion, would not be entitled to go into the House of Commons and deliver a budget which did not have that tax on cigarettes? Is that what he is telling me? If so, he is really—

An Hon. Member: He had honour.

Mr. Trudeau: Hon. Members opposite talk about honour. I wish they would think a little bit with their intelligence rather than with their mouths.

FINAL BUDGET FORM

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. I assume the Prime Minister has now seen and approved, in final form, the budget which will be presented to the people of Canada tonight. If he has not seen and approved it in final form, I hope he will tell the House that. If he has, can he tell the House whether it was from that approved final document that information was obtained by a TV cameraman?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I do not think the Hon. Member should be asking me to tell him what is going to be in the budget tonight and what is not going to be in the budget tonight. I told the House that I have seen some drafts of the budget. I was discussing it again today with the Minister of Finance. I may be meeting him again later in the afternoon to discuss it more.

It would be too bad if the Opposition thought they had a leak and they do not have one, but they cannot have it both ways. They cannot claim to have seen a leak before they have seen the budget. They must see the budget first and then decide (a) if there was a leak, (b) if there was a peek, (c) if it is relevant to the tradition of this Parliament, and they have many questions that they can perhaps ask themselves after they have seen the budget.