

The Budget

West that a special committee study the incident that took place in the House on April 18 and April 19. However, it would only be the case on which to study much more serious questions about the whole notion of secrecy related to the budget and the morality of the media interfering in a way that could break that secrecy unnecessarily.

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to be able to stand and comment on the motion of the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), to whose advice I listened with great pleasure and enjoyment. I regard him as an authority on these matters, particularly since he was the only Finance Minister of whom I know who resigned over a leaky budget after he read it rather than before. That is a great electoral tradition for the Tory Party to follow in the future. I hope all the struggling and ambitious Finance-Ministers-to-be over on the other side absorb the procedure and the advice of the Hon. Member for St. John's West. He set a great tradition for Tories that all of us hope will be followed.

To put the issue into perspective, this motion is totally unnecessary. Let me remind Members of the House of three studies that are taking place right now which are creating some change and reform in our institution. The first is the Committee on Standing Orders and Procedures. It has already indicated that it intends to take this matter into consideration and make recommendations on it.

● (1550)

The second is the green paper on the budget process which was published by the former Minister of Finance and followed by the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) in the presentation and preparation of his April budget.

The third study to which I bring everyone's attention is the work of the Standing Committee on Finance, which has been looking into some very delicate tax matters and making some good, sensible recommendations before they become final policies in the legislation.

Let me read the observations made in the *Montreal Gazette* on April 20, in the midst of all this uproar we saw last April on the budget. At that time, Mr. Ian MacDonald said:

It was the world's first high technology budget leak.

And it was kind of fitting, since Marc Lalonde has discarded the hidebound notions of budget secrecy in the last six months.

In the six months since Lalonde effectively took the wraps off the budget-making process, there's been a steady stream of well sourced leaks and trial balloons.

Depending on which paper you picked up, the government would either let the deficit grow to some \$30 billion and so allow for some job creation, or cap the deficit at \$25 billion in an effort to hold down interest rates.

The other pre-budget trial balloons ran the gamut from Lalonde raising the child tax credit to give poor families some relief from the worst of the recession, to allowing investors inflation relief from their dividend taxes.

Whatever the verdict on the budget itself, Lalonde has changed the rules of the game.

'I've tried to open up the system,' he was saying the other day. 'It's now a process of concertation. The consultations have been very useful for the government.'

The final observation by Mr. MacDonald in this article is:

Lalonde has revolutionized the budget process.

I believe that the April budget was a great success. I think that in the months since it has come into effect business groups, communities, individuals and labour groups right across the country have said that the budget has had a key role in Canada's burgeoning economic recovery. The April budget was a budget for its time. It succeeded marvelously to get our economy going. It is still adding stimulus to the recovery. There is much evidence that people all across the country agree with that observation.

Let us take a look at the events of April 18 and the consequences that would have been brought about if we had followed the advice of various Members of the Opposition. What happened during this famous press conference? We know that a CHCH television careraman was there and that he did a good job. We know that he got a lucky break and pursued it to the best of his ability. We know that he got some photographs of some information on the deficit and on job creation statistics.

We also know that the next day, during the budget, the Minister made some comments about that incident and that he adapted his budget to preserve some of the standards in budget secrecy and parliamentary tradition. What was the result of that incident in the press conference? We had an embarrassed Minister of Finance. We had a very happy newsman. But we did not have any revelation of tax information. We did not have any groups that benefited artificially or prematurely across the country. In other words, we did not have any violation of the traditional standards that have set out budget secrecy.

We heard many irate comments from Opposition politicians. For example, if we look at *Hansard* of Tuesday, April 19, the then Leader of the Opposition—and many would say the real Leader of the Opposition even today—the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) stood up and said as reported at page 24610:

The credibility of his budget has been placed in question along with his own credibility.

That statement tells us why the Member for Yukon is paid to oppose rather than to give us economic advice. Let me continue:

This leaves the Minister the only option of resignation and the production and presentation of a new budget by a new Minister to be appointed to replace him.

That bald statement is made without any real evidence, without any regard for the traditional rules of budget secrecy. It is just an Opposition demand based on some clowning around.

When we look at the real world, we see that Canadians from coast to coast were very worried indeed lest the Minister of Finance should follow that advice. People definitely did not need that kind of disruption in the economy just as it was about to take off again. What we needed was some stimulation that a budget would have provided. To counsel a Minister of Finance to resign at that juncture was irresponsible and totally