

Oral Questions

unemployment insurance handouts than it does to use that money to create jobs so that people can work?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member always uses epithets which apply to him pretty well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: The debate with which we are presently involved has to do with the health of the Canadian economy. We recognize that there are too many unemployed in this land; there is no doubt that. We are doing the best we can.

An hon. Member: You are not.

Mr. Chrétien: At the same time, we have to recognize that this economy performed pretty well in creating 330,000 jobs in the last year. If we want the economy to regain a strong position, we must ensure that Canada is competitive in world markets. If we overburden the public sector now, we will lose our competitive position, we will lose our markets, and whenever we lose markets we lose jobs. We must look at the present situation realistically. I think the people appreciate those who can face these problems and not lose their cool, as the hon. member does.

● (1432)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

DISCUSSIONS WITH QUEBEC ON REDUCTION OF SALES TAX

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Finance.

Yesterday morning on my way to Ottawa I heard a comment on radio to the effect that in his budget the Minister of Finance was going to propose reduced tax points on the provincial sales tax. Therefore I would like to ask him the following question: Is he prepared to say to the House whether he had discussions with the Quebec minister of finance and with those of the other provinces and, if so, how long did those talks last? Is he also in a position to tell us whether Quebec, through its minister of finance, will soon give an affirmative answer to that effect?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to the Quebec minister of finance several weeks ago on the phone about my plans and afterwards I met him in Montreal where we spent several hours discussing the matter. Again, I contacted him last week and yesterday and he assured me that he would probably give me an answer today or in the next few days.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary.

As the minister seems quite convinced that this measure will considerably improve the Canadian economy, can he tell the

[Mr. Broadbent.]

House whether he expects his forecasts to come true and whether he will be willing after those six months to continue to apply the same policy and make sure the economy really grows strong in Canada?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, to my mind it would be unwise to speculate about the steps the government might take under other circumstances.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, on another supplementary.

I should like to ask the Minister of Finance to kindly answer a very serious question. For two hours last night we met representatives of the officials of the Department of Finance. To my astonishment, at one point I learned that those officials had met the press before meeting the elected representatives of the people. I found that rather bold because, after all, the elected representatives of the people are really the ones who are responsible to the people. I have nothing against the press, but as we were kept waiting for an hour, I should like to ask the Minister of Finance whether he would be willing, next time, to set up a meeting so that it is held at least at the same time with the press and with the members of parliament.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure there is a problem in that regard. Yesterday we endeavoured to give explanations to both the press and hon. members of the opposition, as tradition would have it. However, if the hon. member has suggestions to make on how to improve that system, I shall certainly be happy to consider them.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL SECURITY

DISTRIBUTION OF SECRET DOCUMENTS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Solicitor General: it concerns the so-called Top Secret document which received such wide circulation. I ask him first, what is the basis upon which this document was sent to the Deputy Minister of Supply and Services, what interest would he have in this matter to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance, to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Employment and Immigration, or to the representative of that department?

I should like to know something of the basis upon which 58 copies of this highly secret document were distributed to these officials, aside from government members of the security committee of the cabinet. It is something that has not been answered yet. I know that the minister is full of information now, in view of the fact that two weeks ago he said he would have no difficulty in getting an answer to that question.

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I was not here on Friday when that question was put pretty well in the same terms by the right hon. gentleman.