

Oral Questions

An hon. Member: It only happens to you!

Mr. Trudeau: The member opposite says it only happens when we are on this side. Well, Madam Speaker, they changed their minds with respect to Petro-Canada and we did not make a great fuss.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Was the former prime minister talking about his government's policy when he took the position on moving the embassy to Jerusalem? Was he taking an official position and was he repudiating himself and forcing himself to resign?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

● (1420)

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

An hon. Member: Dictator.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Hon. members should allow the Right Hon. Prime Minister to answer the question.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, it was not the Solicitor General who was at fault here. I believe, quite frankly, that when this government presented the amendments to the provinces last summer, including a provision for the protection of property, this was our position. This was the position of the Minister of Justice as he negotiated with the provinces throughout the summer.

Mr. Nielsen: It was his position four days ago, too.

Mr. Trudeau: Therefore, there is nothing untoward or surprising about this turn of events. The point is that the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General at different times were trying to obtain increased consensus for the bill.

Mr. Dick: When is Broadbent going to join the cabinet?

Mr. Trudeau: The difference is that when we talk of increased consensus, we are trying to obtain the support of more provinces or to bring the opposition party onside. When the Leader of the Opposition changes his mind, all he is attempting to do is get his own party onside.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister continues his dances of evasion at which he is a renowned expert. Will the Prime Minister answer this simple question: When does a minister speak for the Government of Canada on a bill which that minister is piloting through a committee of Parliament, and when will that minister be repudiated, as the Solicitor General was repudiated by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice and the Leader of the New Democratic Party the other day? When can we trust the word of a minister of this government?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, it would seem to me that rather than talk of dancing, the Leader of the Opposition should have listened to my previous answer. The minister was speaking for the government when he made that offer on Friday.

Mr. Clark: Commitment.

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, and, I repeat, that was our position last summer. But it did not bring the Tories onside. They seem to want this amendment, but they do not want the whole charter.

Mr. Clark: When can you be trusted, Pierre?

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the Opposition asks when I can be trusted. I did not ask him that question when he took his position on Jerusalem or on Petro-Canada; I said that it was wrong.

Mr. Lawrence: If I remember rightly, you would not take a position on that issue.

Mr. Trudeau: If the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition believes that the position taken by the Solicitor General was wrong, he may make his arguments. But we changed our mind on the matter, and it is as simple as that, as the Leader of the Opposition has changed his mind on several matters.

ALLEGED BREACH OF COMMITMENTS BY MINISTER

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has said that these flip-flops happen frequently; I imagine he was referring to his government. But the situation which we have now is that an undertaking was given by the Solicitor General who was acting as the Minister of Justice, and a clause was passed on that undertaking. That clause was then changed when we moved to another clause because of the undertaking. So there was a very definite—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows that he cannot refer to the proceedings of the committee in question and, therefore, he cannot refer to the fact that a clause was passed. If the hon. member has a question concerning policy or matters which do not refer to the proceedings, he may proceed with that question.

Mr. Nielsen: This concerns Parliament.

Mr. Epp: In view of the fact that certain decisions and actions were taken because of commitments made by a minister under oath, on what basis does the Prime Minister feel he is justified to breach or flip-flop on those commitments? The Prime Minister has said it is because of objections by the provinces, but at the same time he overrides those objections and is willing to impose a referendum, is not willing to impose an amending formula, and there are many other parts of the charter which are opposed as well. How does the Prime Minister square that double standard?