

Oral Questions

the Republic of South Africa and are not appropriate to a democracy such as Canada.

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FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Late last night the chairman of the finance committee shut down the debate on the goods and services tax simply saying—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nystrom: Shame, shame!

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the government side claps for anti-democratic measures and the Canadian public will see that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. McLaughlin: In addition to that, the day before a Catholic priest and an ordinary citizen were arrested outside the House for legitimate and peaceful dissent.

Thirteen times since the 1988 election this government has imposed closure, ending debate on matters in the House. We in the New Democratic Party find this assault on democracy intolerable. I ask the Prime Minister if it is his intention to shut down democracy in the country and to close the debate in the country? If not, what is he prepared to do about his government's actions?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, as several of your predecessors and perhaps even yourself have commented many times, the business of the committee is the business of the committee.

My understanding is that what happened last night was an exact parallel of a situation in June, 1984.

Mr. Harvey (Edmonton East): Wrong.

Mr. Andre: After some 31 hours of filibuster, where witnesses were prevented from appearing before the committee, and in keeping with admonitions in Beauchesne's that committees must in fact finish their business at some point in time, the chairman of the committee, as we all do in this place, used the precedences that were there.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister. Canadians are asking to be heard on the goods and services tax. They have a right to be heard on the goods and services tax.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. McLaughlin: I have a file of letters received in just the last day imploring the government to hear their views on the goods and services tax. I have letters from the National Union of Provincial Government Employees, from the United Fishermen and Workers' Union, letters from the Movement Action Chômage du Québec, Solidarité Populaire du Québec, the Homemakers, the United Steelworkers of America and the Chamber of Commerce.

When will the Prime Minister listen to the requests of Canadians and ensure that we can hear their views on the goods and services tax?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that groups were kept waiting as a result of the tactics of the New Democratic Party in filibustering and going into long, irrelevant and irreverent exchanges of all sorts. We saw the theatrics on television. They were entertaining, but certainly not illuminating.

If, in fact, there are any accusations to be made about not permitting witnesses to appear before the committee, those accusations should be directed to the leader of the New Democratic Party. It was her party's antics that prevented the procedures to be held in a sensible fashion.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is directed to the Prime Minister. What has happened this week is alarming. This file is full of letters. People write us to say what they think of this government's anti-democratic measures. I will quote one from Henri Sader in Montreal:

It is unacceptable that the Finance Committee should refuse to continue hearings on the GST.