

Oral Questions

Mr. Paproski: You will never become an elder statesman.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: You will be out on Harrington Lake, fishing.

Mr. Trudeau: It seems also ironical that in the very question wherein the right hon. gentleman reminds me about having called members of parliament nobodies, he finished by calling members of parliament stupid when he said that truth travels slowly.

An hon. Member: Smile, you are on candid camera.

Mr. Alexander: On that side of the House.

Mr. Clark: It travels fast in a Jetstar.

Mr. Trudeau: As his neighbour, the hon. member for Hamilton West says, he is referring only to other members of the House, not to himself.

Mr. Alexander: With justification.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. This is a very important subject on which I am sure all hon. members and the public are interested in getting some clear information. However, we are getting into areas with very antagonistic questions and correspondingly antagonistic answers which are not getting us anywhere. I wonder if we can get back to the right hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I would point out—

Some hon. Members: Question.

SUGGESTION BY AUDITOR GENERAL PARLIAMENT LOSING CONTROL OVER SUPPLY—REASON FOR ALLEGED CONCEALMENT OF INFORMATION

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): The right hon. Prime Minister says that one should not ask questions here. That is exactly what happened. I therefore ask the question: what has he got to say concerning the considered opinion of the Auditor General that parliament is losing control over its supply and, by inference, it is being appropriated by the cabinet and the civil service? Why should parliament not be entitled to information? Why should there be such concealment on the part of the Prime Minister as, for example, in connection with hiding the identity of those people who provided the pool at our expense?

An hon. Member: Jump into that one.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board made a statement yesterday and he made an announcement on Friday, I believe, which provides the answer to a lot of the justified criticism by the Auditor General, and which indicated the remedies that have been taken and which will be taken. If the right hon. member is returning to the other subjects about the competence of the Auditor General, of course he is competent—

[Mr. Trudeau.]

An hon. Member: Why not follow him then? He is an officer of parliament.

Mr. Trudeau: He expresses a point of view and it does not seem—

Mr. Clark: Convenient.

Mr. Trudeau:—it does not seem inconsistent that the government would want to make sure that parliamentary institutions are not only run from the point of view of accountancy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE IN FORM OF MAIN ESTIMATES—AGREEMENT OF AUDITOR GENERAL TO ESTABLISHMENT OF ROYAL COMMISSION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a supplementary question to the President of the Treasury Board. In view of the statement made yesterday by the Auditor General as follows:

I am deeply concerned that, on the evidence of the two-year examination carried out by the Audit Office, parliament—and indeed the government—has lost or is close to losing effective control of the public purse.

Further, by the references made to the Auditor General with respect to the fact that no satisfactory progress has been made regarding recommendations on the form of the estimates by the Public Accounts Committee, can the minister tell the House before the main estimates are tabled, what effective reforms he intends to implement so that this House can at least know the extent of government extravagance in the estimates?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I have answered that before but I will do so again. There is a commitment, and it is in the progress report I tabled on Friday, that clearly indicates our desire, our willingness, our commitment to place before the Public Accounts Committee, in answer to a commitment to the Public Accounts Committee, the draft proposals and guide to the elaboration of information governing the estimates. When the Public Accounts Committee has had an opportunity to look at that and advise us whether it is acceptable, then it is our intention to implement this; that is, to meet the commitment made to the members of the Public Accounts Committee, a non-partisan committee made up of members of the House of all parties.

Mr. McGrath: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the minister by the establishment of a royal commission has effectively repudiated the Auditor General and consequently this House,—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath:—I ask the minister, in view of the catalogue of uncontrolled extravagance contained in the Auditor General's report yesterday, and in view of the failure to make any