

Oral Questions

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear why these people were invited to participate. They were invited by the officials of the Department of Finance on the basis of their professional qualifications. These people are seen by the tax community as the best tax experts in the country. If the Hon. Member wants to ask around about the qualifications of these people in their community, I think he would find that that is exactly the basis on which they are regarded by their peers.

Ms. Copps: What about Peat Marwick?

CHANGE MADE TO BUDGET BY FORMER MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. I preface it with the observation that the Speaker has said that he ruled the question of privilege out of order because privilege is defined in very narrow and strict terms. However, he went on to say that the White Paper "has very important budgetary implications".

With regard to the Prime Minister's answer about Marc Lalonde, I suggest that the conclusion is the opposite to the one he reached. Is it not the case that Marc Lalonde changed the Budget precisely because it was discovered that he had done something wrong?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my recollection is that British parliamentary practice calls for the Minister's resignation when information with regard to a Budget is made public. As I understand it, with regard to the case of Mr. Lalonde that information was made public. The Minister did not resign, in violation of British parliamentary practice. He changed the Budget and then came back into the House and said he did not have to resign because the information was different from that in the document which had been filmed.

I think my hon. friend would agree that that is a complete violation of British parliamentary practice while the present Minister of Finance is in total conformity with British parliamentary practice.

● (1440)

MINISTER'S ACTIONS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I say with respect that I think the Prime Minister has drawn the wrong conclusion again. As I understand the case, the Hon. Marc Lalonde would have had to do one of two things—either change the budget document in respect of the information that was revealed to the public, or resign. He changed the document. In this case a Minister gave privileged access to budgetary information—

An Hon. Member: It is not budgetary.

Mr. Broadbent: —information that has direct budgetary implications, as the Speaker has said. The Minister in question

neither changed the document afterwards nor submitted his resignation. When will he do the right thing?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend says that Mr. Lalonde had to do one of two things. That is where we part company. Mr. Lalonde should have done one thing, that is, resign. He made that Budget public and the photographic evidence was obtained. There is a fundamental difference. He did not have two options. Pursuant to parliamentary practice that is cited so well by a former Minister of Finance, who is presently the Leader of the Opposition, there was one inevitable conclusion which Mr. Lalonde ought to have made. He chose not to, and changed the practice, and changed his Budget.

Ms. Copps: You are doing neither.

Mr. Mulroney: The White Paper is not a Budget. It is something entirely different from a Budget, as White Papers have traditionally been since this country was founded. My hon. friend knows that.

PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, those were not my words, they were the words of the Speaker who said that this White Paper is not merely a discussion document of some kind. He said it "has very important budgetary implications".

Perhaps a difference between the Marc Lalonde situation and the present one is that at least all the people in Canada had access to the particular point that Mr. Lalonde incorrectly revealed, whereas this Minister just gave it to a handful of people.

Miss MacDonald: They are under oath.

Mr. Broadbent: Would the Prime Minister not agree that there is an important distinction to be made between consulting people before preparing a document, whether it is a White Paper or a Budget, and giving them the information after the document has been prepared, which is this case? If he agrees that they should not have privileged access, why were the documents not taken back and held for at least 24 hours to make complete changes, or why did the Minister not do the correct thing, which is indeed to resign under the circumstances?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend will agree that he has asked a number of questions. Let us deal with the fundamental issue.

A White Paper is not something that is truly exceptional. We are considering one tonight and there was one some two weeks ago on the question of national defence. It is the same kind of instrument that is used in a parliamentary democracy for a Government to put forward plans and invite debate and consideration of a great national issue. It sets forth the general thrust of government thinking, but it is not a Budget in the