

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

THE ECONOMY

ADVICE GIVEN BY QUEBEC MINISTERS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister who will know that two of his cabinet colleagues, the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Minister of State from Quebec, have broken cabinet solidarity and have publicly joined the demand for action to start fighting unemployment now and for changes in the government's budget. Is the Prime Minister going to heed their advice or is he going to ask for their resignations?

● (1415)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has a curious definition of breaking cabinet solidarity. The ministers in question, and I believe a few backbenchers, signed a letter just taking up the Minister of Finance on a proposal that he had made in Toronto in suggesting that he consider certain remedial actions. If I can quote from the address of the Minister of Finance made in Toronto on January 25, he said this:

This is not to minimize the importance of the very considerable resources which the government is devoting to job creation within the existing fiscal framework. Fiscal restraint does not and will not prohibit the government from taking targeted and specific measures to improve growth, productivity, and investment.

That some members of our caucus should have decided to suggest what some of those targets and specific measures should be, does not seem to me, Madam Speaker, a breach of cabinet solidarity, or indeed, of caucus solidarity.

Mr. Crosbie: Juvenility.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR BUDGETARY POLICY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister referred to two ministers, one of them a very senior minister, both of whom are absent from the House today, and what he referred to disparagingly as just "a few backbenchers"—those few backbenchers number eight—which makes a total of ten at least who have taken issue with the government's policy and broken the support which governments usually find on budgetary matters.

The question which the Prime Minister has raised is whether or not members who have broken solidarity, and ministers who have broken it, are acting within the context of cabinet solidarity. The Prime Minister will know that there have been two statements on the budget made by senior ministers, one by the Minister of Finance in this House on Friday who said:

It would be tempting, but I think foolhardy, to undertake short-term palliatives or quick fixes which might give the appearance of action but which, down the road, would add further to the unemployment situation.

That is the view of the Minister of Finance.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Minister of State, and at least eight colleagues—we do not know how many more are with them and against the minister in the Liberal caucus—said that they are convinced that measures to alleviate unemployment in the home construction industry and to alleviate the youth unemployment problem must be adopted right now, as such moves cannot wait for the results of a long-term economic policy. Those are two absolutely different views on the budget. May I ask the Prime Minister who speaks for the Government of Canada on budgetary matters?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I believe I dealt with the matter of cabinet solidarity. The Leader of the Opposition does not care to refer to the quotation I just gave of what the Minister of Finance said on January 25, followed up, as I say, by this request for specific action. I think the Leader of the Opposition is engaging in some somewhat byzantine attempts to find fissures in this caucus as a distraction to looking behind him and seeing his split caucus behind him.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: That is a Mickey Mouse explanation.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Look behind and around you, Allan.

STATEMENT MADE BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, then let me ask the Prime Minister whether the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, that beleaguered gentleman from whom we hear more than he would like, because his minister does not have the courage to stand in the firing line himself, was speaking for the government when he said, in response to these specific proposals put forward by two cabinet ministers and eight other Liberal Members of Parliament, that the programs they were proposing would create worse problems in future. Is that a position of the Government of Canada? Was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance speaking for the government when he rejected categorically the proposal by two cabinet ministers and eight Liberal Members of Parliament?

Mr. Crosbie: What about that, Pierre?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, that is another example of the exiguousness in which the Leader of the Opposition is engaging, that is, a comparison of texts. He can continue this game.

● (1420)

I can assure him that the position of the Minister of Finance is supported in the very letter to which he refers, a letter which indicates the government is on the right macroeconomic