

Oral Questions

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the hon. member quoted me incorrectly. I did not say that the reason for the high interest rates was to fight inflation; I said it was because inflation was high and people were only lending their money at higher rates of interest. That is why rates of interest are high, and that is why inflation must be brought down.

Mr. Wilson: Madam Speaker, that is a truism. What we need in this country is action, action from the Prime Minister, not some philosophical statements.

REQUEST THAT ENERGY TAXES BE REDUCED

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, let me put another question to the Prime Minister. The key part of the increase in prices, according to the report released this morning, was the high price for gasoline, heating oil and natural gas. Since heavy federal government taxes are a very important part of these price increases, would the Prime Minister consider forgoing some of those taxes in order to reduce the price increase in energy costs, particularly in view of the fact that the United States now has gasoline prices lower than those in Canada?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the hon. member somehow takes affront because what I said was a truism. If the hon. member had not stated a falsism, I would not have had to state a truism.

In so far as the hon. member's suggestion as to tax policy is concerned, I will make sure the Minister of Finance receives the hon. member's message.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

APPEARANCE OF MINISTER OF FINANCE BEFORE STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, because we have not been able to get answers, could I direct a question to the chairman of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs? Would the chairman of that committee confirm that he has a definite arrangement for the Minister of Finance to appear at the committee hearings on April 29 and April 30, and again in the first week of May, so that for once this year the House of Commons committee can question the Minister of Finance with respect to his policies? The chairman knows that the Minister of Finance has ducked the committee hearings not only all last fall but so far all this year. Will he give us the commitment he has from the Minister of Finance as to his attendance next week and into the first week of May?

● (1420)

Mr. John Evans (Ottawa Centre): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the minister has given his commitment to

meet on April 29 and April 30. The question about the first week of May was raised with me last night. I have not been able to talk with the minister. I have talked with his parliamentary secretary. We will do all in our power to see that the minister is able to attend in the first week of May, but certainly a commitment has been made for April 29 and 30, and I should add that on previous occasions the minister has not been at the committee for very good and valid reasons of public policy. We should not put forward the argument to the people that the minister is trying to avoid the committee, because it is not true.

REQUEST FOR VERIFICATION OF RUMOUR

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, inasmuch as the chairman has said that the minister has not been avoiding the committee, could he perhaps enlighten the House as to what urgent meeting the Minister of Finance had in Toronto last evening, or is the rumour correct that the minister needed some time to prepare for examination by banks and other officials in Toronto and that he did not have the answers—

Madam Speaker: I am not sure that question can be answered by the chairman of the committee.

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THE ECONOMY

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON INTEREST RATES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. During the past two years Canadians have been losing their homes, businesses have gone broke in record numbers—a thousand last month alone—and thousands of workers have lost their jobs, all in the name of a high interest rate policy allegedly aimed at curing inflation. Considering that the figures released today show that the cost of living rose more rapidly during the past month than for any period in almost a year, will the government finally admit that it was wrong and abandon this high interest rate dogmatism?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, as I have had occasion to explain before to the hon. member, the government does not have a high interest rate policy. There are high interest rates because the rate of inflation is high. Naturally people who save money and put it aside do not want to lend it at low interest rates when the rate of inflation is high. This is why, time after time, I have attempted to convey to the Leader of the New Democratic Party that we do not have a policy of high interest rates, that we have high inflation. The way to bring down interest rates is to bring down inflation. This is why the endless suggestions of the New Democratic Party for spending on this, that, and the next thing, are not helping to bring down inflation. On the contrary, they are helping to increase the deficit, to increase