

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

Mr. Speaker: I will hear from the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) and will come to the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) in a moment.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, in my many years as a Member of this Parliament I have never experienced a situation similar to this. What the Minister has been promising for months now are not some minor changes in our tax system. What he has been intimating is that we are going to get a very fundamental reorganization of the whole system. It has been said, indeed, reported, that we are going to see that the system will be simpler and fairer, that income tax rates will come down, that consumption taxes such as the business transfer tax will go up, that corporation taxes will go up, and many of the loopholes in the present system for corporations and individuals will be plugged.

If these reforms take place, as has been intimated by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), and other members on the government side, they will be very important changes which will affect, as the Minister said a few moments ago, virtually every Canadian.

So what we have here is that 20 tax lawyers and accountants have been consulted. I am certain that they have not just given some advice on minor technical points. I am certain that in the period during which they were being consulted they expressed their views on some of the proposed changes, whether they were in agreement or whether they thought they would be detrimental.

A couple of things happened as a result of that. First, these 20 tax lawyers and accountants obviously have an advantage. I am not saying they are going to use their knowledge before eight o'clock tomorrow night, but at eight o'clock tomorrow night when all the Members of Parliament, tax lawyers and accountants are beginning to study what is in the report, these people will have had days or weeks of advantage over all the other tax lawyers and accountants who are in the same business.

I have another major concern. I am sure that the kind of accountant who does my income tax was not consulted. So what we have are 20 lawyers and accountants who, I am certain, have as clients some of the biggest corporations in this country, expressing their views to the Minister and his department. If they are there to express their views and the views of the corporations they represent, where were the representatives of ordinary Canadians? Where were the representatives of the workers, the farming community, the consumers? Are their views, their feelings and philosophical approach to taxation and their desire to see a fair tax system not as valid as these 20 so-called experts? It seems to me that that is a question the Minister ought to answer.

If the Minister wanted consultation, and we all agree that consultation is a good idea, why did he not have consultation with a wide spectrum of our society? Why did he go for advice to representatives who, I am certain we will find out when we receive the list, represent big business? I think that is a very

important question to which the Minister should address himself.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by addressing briefly the point made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader (Mr. Lewis) with respect to precedents. Obviously, I have not had the time to get out the precedents and study them, but the second precedent quoted by the Parliamentary Secretary, I think is relevant. He said that the Speaker in making his ruling said only that he had serious doubts that budgetary secrecy is a matter of privilege. He did not rule conclusively that budgetary secrecy is not a matter of privilege. Therefore, I respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that that precedent, at least, is one the Chair does not have to consider binding upon itself.

The Minister of Finance himself has argued that the issue as to whether we have a prima facie case of privilege turns on, among other things, whether or not this group of 20 experts looked at material which was part of a budget. The Minister of Finance himself argued that that was a very relevant consideration and in effect he was saying that if the group of 20 experts did not look at material to be contained in a budget then we are not dealing with a prima facie case of privilege. However, if the group of 20 experts was looking at material which was to be contained in a budget, that would be a different matter.

What did the Minister of Finance himself say in this House in answer to the motion of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) on this point? At first he said the White Paper is a proposal, it does not represent budgetary policy. But later when trying to explain why he had this group of 20 experts looking at material that he originally said was to go into a White Paper, he said, "I am getting technical advice so we are not making budgetary policy in a vacuum".

● (1600)

The Minister of Finance has therefore admitted exactly what it is he will be presenting to the House at eight o'clock. This is confirmed by the fact that he will at that time, as he admitted a few minutes ago, table a Ways and Means motion.

Why else would he be tabling a Ways and Means motion if his so-called White Paper was not in fact in the nature of a budget? Is he trying to get us to believe that he is tabling a Ways and Means motion about something completely unrelated to the White Paper and is just choosing this convenient opportunity tomorrow night to table it?

The Minister of Finance has made some valiant attempts to convince people of the unbelievable. But I am sure that even he will not take seriously that type of effort, if that is what he intends.

The evidence from the Minister himself is clear. What he is submitting tomorrow at eight o'clock is in the nature of a budget. If that is the case, then on the argument of the Minister of Finance himself what he has done by allowing this group of 20 to have access to the material to be presented in