

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it would be appropriate to give that undertaking. I want to bring the report on executive compensation to cabinet, discuss it with my colleagues and consider the very serious arguments that are always put forth by this committee of private entrepreneurs and managers who have always given very sound advice to the government.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must realize that once again the reputation of his government on the question of the seriousness of its commitment to restraint is at issue here. What I am asking for, and what the House would like to have, is a commitment by the Prime Minister now on the principle that in a period of restraint there will not be an acceptance by the government of the very substantial increases recommended by the advisory group on executive compensation. Can we have that commitment of principle now?

Mr. Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition seems to forget very readily that the senior executive service has been frozen for one year. They, with members of parliament, are I believe the only people in the economy who have—

Mr. Blackburn: They are starving.

Mr. Trudeau: You do not look as though you are starving.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I am not prepared to take the easy route of trying to find one group in the economy whom we can control directly and make scapegoats out of them as the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, it would be encouraging to the elderly, the unemployed and other Canadians if the Prime Minister would show the same degree of concern for them as he shows for senior public servants who have enjoyed what must be regarded as a very comfortable freeze. I would like to ask the Prime Minister now in relation to the fact that we have seen in this country, particularly during the years of his leadership, a growth in the power of the public bureaucracy compared to the power of the cabinet and parliament, for an undertaking that the treatment given by his government to this report will rebut the assumption that the direction and management of government lies with civil servants and will instead underline the principle of parliamentary democracy in this country, that the people who are to make the decisions in this country are those who sit in this House and not the highly paid elitist group who are the beneficiaries of this most recent recommendation.

Oral Questions

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

ALLEGED ABDICATION OF GOVERNMENT FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC POLICY—FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my question is also addressed to the Prime Minister. I was wondering whether the Prime Minister has ever considered that the frequent recommendations made to him in recent months by the Auditor General, the Conference Board, the Economic Council of Canada and now the Lambert report are in essence an indictment of the government's capacity to accept full responsibility for the financial problems confronting this country and its preparedness to hand over that responsibility to the public service?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I am not quite sure what the hon. member means, Mr. Speaker, but I am sure the answer must be no.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): My question is again to the Prime Minister. In view of the fact that his government is consistently talking about the need to hold the public service accountable and the difficulty under our parliamentary system of making them accountable to this House, does the government not even envisage the need to ensure total fiscal responsibility from its public servants so that in turn parliament can require accountability from those who, in the final analysis, must accept responsibility for these acts, namely, the ministers on the front bench?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I remain confused about what the hon. member means by "fiscal responsibility". It seems to me that every citizen in this country has to be totally fiscally responsible. So what?

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FINANCE

RECONCILIATION OF POLICY OF REDUCTION OF EXPENDITURES WITH RECOMMENDATION FOR SALARY INCREASES FOR SENIOR PUBLIC SERVANTS

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): This time I will address my supplementary question to the Minister of Finance. If I cannot get answers from the Prime Minister, I can at least try to get them from the Minister of Finance. On page 8 of the Lambert report the advisory group refers to the deception in the public mind of the government's undertakings to restrain and reduce public expenditure. In the light of this comment, can the Minister of Finance explain how he will reconcile that particular comment with the recommendations made later in the report on page 20 concerning substantial increases in executive compensation in the public service?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that what the commissioners were