

Oral Question

revenue coming to the treasury. I ask the minister very simply, in the event that additional revenue does come to the treasury because we have changed the base and the rate, will the government remit that excess? It is a very simple question.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of State (Finance)): The answer is as simple as the question, namely, since the assumption does not make sense, no answer is necessary.

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[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE**RIGHT OF PUBLIC SERVANTS TO COMMENT ON PUBLIC POLICY**

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I will not comment on that assault on parliamentary democracy by the Minister of State for Finance. Let me direct a supplementary question to the President of the Treasury Board. He will have noted the response by his colleague, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who drew an interesting distinction when he said that the United States ambassador, and I quote, "was speaking in his personal capacity". Does the government accept that Canadian public servants have the right to comment on public policy in their personal capacity?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, the entire issue is one of what conduct is appropriate for public servants. As I indicated earlier, I firmly believe it is a question of judgment in each particular case. Clearly there is a difference between a public servant in one area of the bureaucracy commenting in general terms about a government policy and a senior public servant becoming involved in an issue of controversy, picketing, appearing on radio shows, whatever. Clearly there are questions of conduct which must be matters of judgment for the deputy minister to decide. Ultimately, if the deputy minister is wrong, just as if a private employer is wrong in determining that an employee has acted in a manner incompatible with his duties, the employer, in this case the Public Service Staff Relations Board, and ultimately the courts, if necessary, will determine whether the deputy minister acted improperly.

COMMENTS MADE BY DISMISSED KINGSTON PUBLIC SERVANT

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the minister cannot shift this responsibility off to deputy ministers. The government has a responsibility to establish policy and to indicate the principles on which that policy is based. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has recognized that foreign public servants operating in Canada have the right to speak in their personal capacity. The Government of Canada has denied the right of public servants operating in Canada to speak in their personal capacity. That is the principle and the inconsistency here. There is one standard for Americans speaking in Canada and a quite different standard

for Canadians speaking in Canada. That is what we find unacceptable.

Let me come to the specific instance. The minister will know that the only action Parliament has taken on the metric question has been to approve a measure which allowed voluntary implementation. An order in council was passed, which ran against the will of Parliament, imposing implementation. What Mr. Fraser did was speak the principle that parliament spoke. Is a public servant in Canada to lose his job because that public servant speaks the principles that Parliament speaks?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I have not nor do I intend to make any personal judgment with respect to the circumstances of Mr. Fraser. The Leader of the Opposition pleads his case very eloquently. I assume that similar representations will be made to the Public Service Staff Relations Board, and that body, which is there specifically to protect the interests of employees and employers, both ways, will ultimately decide whether Mr. Fraser was dealt with properly. I see no point in pursuing the issue here. It is purely one of judgment based upon the facts of a particular case. There are no overriding questions of principle involved. Surely the Leader of the Opposition expects certain conduct from employees. The issue is whether the conduct was appropriate or not appropriate. It is that simple.

REASONS FOR FIRING OF PUBLIC SERVANT

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the minister is suggesting what the country already knows, that this government acts without any principle at all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: My question is to the Minister of National Revenue. The minister knows what Mr. Fraser said and what Parliament said. He knows that the only guidelines in the Department of National Revenue are draft guidelines, not guidelines that are actually in effect. Will the minister tell us why he fired Mr. Fraser?

Hon. William Rompkey (Minister of National Revenue): Madam Speaker, at the first instance of Mr. Fraser's conduct involving the press and in public, he was counselled that if he had certain things he wanted to say through certain channels, that was a different matter altogether; for example, if he had made his representation through his Member of Parliament. Mr. Fraser chose to bring this to the public forum, to use the media and to criticize government programs openly.

I would also make the point that I do not think it is right that Parliament be substituted for a legitimate grievance procedure. There is a grievance procedure and that procedure is being followed. I do not feel it is right for Parliament to judge what is legitimately the judgment of another body.

Mr. Clark: Martial law.