

Privilege

Finance understand their overriding role as trustees and custodians of our parliamentary system.

• (1130)

The issue is not whether the Minister of Finance personally released information to the news media, the issue is one of trust placed by this Parliament in him because of his role, trust placed by Canadians in him because of his custody over the finances and accounting of the nation.

The issue is not why the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did not choose the correct course of action immediately upon learning of the largest release of budgetary information in the history of democracy? That is what Canadians want to know. Why, when this was first discovered, did the Prime Minister not come immediately before the House?

Why did the Prime Minister not ask for his resignation? More importantly, why didn't the Minister, to preserve what remaining credibility he has, offer that resignation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Simmons: Resign. Resign. You do not have the guts to do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the main issue before the House is not whether the Minister himself is negligent, whether the Minister is personally responsible. In our system of government, he holds a position of trust. He must assume his responsibilities for Finance and for his officials and for everything that goes on under his authority.

So I am very surprised that this Minister has not had the courage, the honesty, in keeping with Parliamentary traditions, to offer the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) his resignation. Since he did not, why did the Prime Minister not ask for his resignation?

[*English*]

There is no alternative in our system of Government. That is why we need a new Minister of Finance, that is why we need a new Budget, and that is why this a non-event under your authorship.

There is no alternative, there is no substitute for meeting the people's representatives in the House of Commons to have a hastily-called budget presentation before the media and thereby to Canadians.

We have a democratic system. We have a parliamentary system. The people of Canada entrust us with the responsibility of reviewing their taxation and their expenses. The Minister of Finance has abused that trust and in doing so he has abused a fundamental principle of parliamentary democracy.

We are talking about ministerial responsibility. We are talking about the integrity of our system. We are talking about the integrity of our form of government. We are talking about the public's confidence in our system.

We are not talking about whether or not the Prime Minister can salvage the Minister of Finance. We are not talking about whether or not the Minister of Finance can survive.

The Prime Minister should already have demanded his resignation and this Minister should have already resigned.

Some Hon. Members: Resign. Resign.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): In the circumstances before you this morning we consider this to be a non-Minister, a non-Budget, and a non-event.

Budget secrecy is not just some minor rule which the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance can throw away at whim.

Mr. Beatty: We heard that at the press conference last night.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): It is at the heart of how we function as a people. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance know that and they cannot avoid it. It is extraordinary, it is shocking, it is disgraceful that in their arguments so far to the public and this morning here in the House of Commons, the Minister has missed the point. He has perverted our system, attempted to blame the Opposition, and not accepted the responsibility for those for whom he is responsible.