

Oral Questions

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): The Government sinks into more disrepute with every answer.

Mr. Crosbie: Question.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): A small dose of frankness would do wonders.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister not recognize that his Minister of Finance has breached a centuries-old tradition of tax secrecy which ensures that all the citizens of the realm are treated equally? If he does, why is his Minister of Finance still the Minister of Finance today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my right hon. friend says that he is not questioning the integrity of the outside advisers and then proceeds to do precisely that.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mulroney: He proceeds to imply very categorically that they had a "cosy advantage" which they were going to abuse notwithstanding their oath of secrecy and position of trust which this Government and other Governments have used with regard to—

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Give me a precedent for this particular situation.

Mr. Mulroney: I will give a precedent on giving out tax information. When Marc Lalonde was Minister of Finance the Budget was put out to all Canadian people. When they were caught they changed it, which cost Canadians \$200 million. That is a fundamental violation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

CHOICE OF MEMBERS OF SPECIALISTS GROUP

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister and is on the same subject. The Prime Minister says that the chosen few, the group of 31, were not given an unfair advantage. Canadians do not believe that and the facts suggest otherwise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: Question.

Mr. Nunziata: How were the chosen few in fact chosen? How was this elite group of 31 put together? Can he explain why, for example, the major firms of Laventhol & Horwath,

Peat Marwick, and Samson Belair were not invited to participate in this elite group? Can he explain how the others were chosen?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I can only tell my hon. friend that which has been conveyed publicly, that is, that the officials of the Department of Finance who have dealt with tax matters over the years under successive Governments have consulted with people from the private sector. I was not aware of who was being consulted. If some people have been left off the list, I am sure we would be happy to correct it.

Ms. Copps: I bet you would.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, perhaps when the Prime Minister is correcting the list he might want to invite the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Canadian Labour Congress, the poverty organizations, and all the other major groups in the country who have an interest in the White Paper.

CRITERIA USED IN SELECTING GROUP MEMBERS

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, is it mere coincidence or pure happenstance that the firms of Ernst & Whinney and Thorne Riddell contributed over \$164,000 to the Conservative Party between 1984 and 1985? Was it mere coincidence that they contributed this amount of money and were subsequently invited to select two people to participate in this elite group?

Mr. Penner: Now we know.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Hon. Members will of course understand that that question does not go to the administration of the Government or any particular Department thereof. It is, of course, in the hands of Ministers whether they wish to answer the question.

Mr. Nunziata: Perhaps I can rephrase the question, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Gauthier: How were they chosen?

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member has indicated that he is prepared to accept my admonishment and rephrase the question.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, we in the Opposition and indeed all Canadians would like to know how this list was put together. I will direct the question to the Minister of Finance.

What criteria were used to choose the major firms invited to participate in this elite group? Can he explain why certain major accounting firms and certain major law firms were not invited to participate? Would he not agree that those invited to participate would have an unfair advantage in the situation?