

Oral Questions

● (1502)

Mr. Broadbent: The Prime Minister knows as well as anyone in this House that the answer he has given will not stand up to hard-headed analysis. Considering that, for the reason he indicated, the sales tax reduction would benefit industries which were producing a lot of goods and services, and the federal government gave special consideration to the Atlantic provinces because they do not produce as much as, for example, Ontario, and in that case the federal government agreed to pay the complete tax write-off for Atlantic Canada, and considering that the proposal the federal government made disproportionately—not proportionately—favours industry in Ontario over Quebec, why is it the Prime Minister is not willing to take compensatory action for Quebec, given the fact that more than 500,000 Quebecers are unemployed?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, as far as compensatory action is concerned, the hon. member knows that this side of the House has indeed taken a great deal of action in the case of Quebec and the maritimes. I have even heard it said on the other side that we are favouring Quebec too much with our DREE program and our decentralization program.

An hon. Member: You have not heard it from over here.

Mr. Trudeau: No, I have heard it from a premier of that party, though, who said publicly we were favouring Quebec too much.

An hon. Member: Who was it?

Mr. Trudeau: I will tell you later. You don't have many premiers around.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: As far as helping Quebec is concerned, I am very glad that the parties opposite are telling us we should do more with federal tax money. I hope they will be saying that during the election campaign, because many of them say exactly the contrary.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: It is not a question of not wanting to help the provincial economy in Quebec. But when we put a budget together and try to get ten provinces to agree, surely there must be a point at which the provinces say "Yes, we do", or "No, we don't".

In this case nine said they did agree. One said they didn't know, but would tell us later. Surely, this is not an unreasonable position. If they wanted particular treatment, as some are asserting now, that request could have been made before the budget was brought down. We might have said, "Well, this is not too good, but if you need it we shall offer it to the other provinces." The result, as hon. members will appreciate, is that each province would have accepted the application of the sales tax in a way which would benefit that particular province, and

[Mr. Trudeau.]

that is not our idea of the Canadian economy as one unified model.

Mr. Broadbent: Considering that Mr. Claude Ryan, the new leader of the Liberal party in Quebec, is quoted in today's paper as saying, with reference to the unreasonable position of federal priorities on all the provinces, "It is surely not desirable that measures be taken which seem to want to impose in the area of financial development changes which come under the jurisdiction of the provinces", and since Mr. Ryan, in saying this, is joined by all the other provincial premiers, does the Prime Minister not think his little lecture about Quebec being unreasonable in not replying at the same time as the other provinces is a little unreasonable on his part?

Further, would the Prime Minister reply to my other question pertaining to the fact that the tax cut of the federal government provides benefits disproportionately—not proportionately—to industry in Ontario, which has led Quebec to look for equitable treatment just as the people of the Atlantic provinces got equitable treatment in the special approach taken to the tax in their case? Will the Prime Minister finally attempt to answer the questions which are being put to him today by members on this side of the House?

Mr. Trudeau: I shall attempt to answer the question. I note the words of the hon. member, that we were proposing unreasonable federal priorities. I think that is what he said.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Claude Ryan said that.

Some hon. Members: Call an election.

Mr. Trudeau: We shall let Mr. Ryan speak for himself. The hon. member is not quoting him accurately. We will take those words as his own. Anyway, it is not what Mr. Ryan has said that matters to the hon. member. He wants an answer to the question whether we were imposing unreasonable federal priorities: that is the substance of the question, I take it.

Mr. Broadbent: No, it is not.

Mr. Trudeau: Oh, it is not. Then the hon. member was just quoting words which were not substantive to the question. Let me point out that in terms of imposing priorities—

Mr. Broadbent: Call the election now.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am enjoying myself. Hon. members opposite want to have an election. Don't they want to finish the budget debate? Would they not be interested in passing that legislation?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: You are insufferable.

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Some hon. Members: Order.