

*Oral Questions*

yesterday and was supported by other Hon. Members, keeping in mind my admonition that I have I asked Hon. Members to remember that we must always guard the reputations of those outside this Chamber and respect their integrity and innocence in these matters.

I thank Hon. Members for their interventions yesterday, interventions which were lengthy but which I believe were important.

• (1425)

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

**TAX REFORM****TAX SPECIALISTS' ACCESS TO ADVANCE INFORMATION**

**Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, we of course accept your ruling on the question of privilege on the basis of our knowledge and your knowledge of the facts as they are now available to us. We note that you left the question of propriety open, so my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

As a result of a letter written today by the Minister of Finance to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Laval-des-Rapides, who is currently quarantined, we know 31 specially privileged lawyers and accountants were given advance information on tax policy. I suggest in the strongest terms that was wrong, unfair, and unethical. It is as simple and clear as that. What is not clear is whether the Government knows the difference between right and wrong and, if it does, whether it really cares.

Did the Prime Minister know that 31 leading specialists in tax law and accounting were to be given privileged access to the White Paper in advance of Members of Parliament and other Canadians, and did he personally approve?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, my right hon. friend of course knows it is not wrong, not unfair, and the conduct was not unethical. Surely he just heard the Speaker purport to speak in the name of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition where, as I understand it, he, the Right Hon. Member, did not suggest there was anything improper or unethical regarding the conduct of those people who participated. The question then becomes is this kind of consultation conventional? I think it is.

The tradition for some considerable period of time has been that, given the progressive complexity of tax legislation on the social policy, labour and legal sides, Ministers of Finance reach out to various experts from all walks of life to seek guidance and counsel in the application of tax policy. That is what was done by the Minister of Finance and the Government, and I think it is entirely proper and helpful.

**Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not understand or is not willing to understand. The Speaker left open the question of propriety. He left it open to debate and to the judgment of the Canadian people. His Honour dispensed with the question of privilege but left open the question of propriety.

**Mr. Shields:** He said it was political debate, John.

**Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra):** We are not questioning the ethics of those who accepted the invitation from the Minister of Finance. We are questioning the ethics of the Minister in giving an unfair advantage to experts at the expense of the Canadian people.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, how unfortunate that the Prime Minister should be unable to understand this question.

**INQUIRY WHY 31 PRIVILEGED PERSONS WERE ENABLED TO EXAMINE DETAILS IN ADVANCE**

**Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition):** The question is this: Why did the Prime Minister allow these 31 privileged persons to gain advance knowledge of some of the details of the tax reform, ahead of Hon. Members and ahead of other Canadians? Can the Prime Minister tell us why he did not chastise the Minister of Finance for inviting these experts and giving them preferential treatment, thus completely ignoring all other Canadians?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that nobody was given preferential treatment, that it was a perfectly normal practice, followed by other Ministers of Finance, to consult experts in this field in an attempt to come up with a tax policy which is consistent with the interests of all Canadians. This process dates back to a few years. The Leader of the Opposition is asking me why the Prime Minister allowed . . . Yes, but as far as I know many Prime Ministers before me not only allowed but even urged their Ministers of Finance to consult even more, and I would suggest that is precisely what the Minister of Finance did under perfectly normal circumstances.

**NATURE OF OBJECTION**

**Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, we did not say the Minister of Finance had no right to consult experts. No. We do object to the fact that the Minister gave these experts an advantage after making his final decision. That is the difference which the Prime Minister fails to understand.

• (1430)

[English]

The books were closed and these gentlemen had a cosy advantage over the rest of the country.