

Statement by Finance Minister

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, the minister has not answered the question as to the urgency of debate; he has tried to justify his action. I dispute his statement that he has not created confusion. It is absolutely urgent that we discuss this matter at this time, whether or not there will be an opportunity to discuss it in the future as a result of negotiations. That is very indefinite; we do not know when or under what circumstances there will be an opportunity to debate the question which has now arisen.

I urge upon Your Honour that this whole matter, having arisen as a result of the minister's statement on motions at a time when the markets are open, should be discussed now. The fact that these questions will be discussed with representatives of the provinces will in itself occasion further leaks. The place where announcements of this kind should be discussed is in this house itself. These matters must be debated here. The propriety of this matter and the manner in which this has been done is doubtful. The markets are now open and this sort of action will allow all sorts of things to take place. This action is quite wrong. In light of other matters now before the house, which we must debate at this time, I urge upon Your Honour to allow this motion.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I must say that the conduct of the government today would make a speechless member rise in his place.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have never seen the like of this. I doubt whether there is another example of this anywhere. The government has gone from blunder to blunder. It now says, as a result of blunders to date, parliament is not now to have the right to discuss what this government has in mind. The minister says we will have an opportunity, possibly next week, after consultation with members of the opposition, to debate this matter. What specious nonsense is that?

The minister states that from time to time in the past when he announced his intention to bring down a budget, there was naturally a feeling of uncertainty in the country, but that cannot be compared with the present situation. Is what has taken place today the result of something that occurred in the last few hours to bring this government to its senses? The government refuses to tell the people of Canada what has taken place.

[Mr. Sharp.]

The action of the government today will bring about results that one can only measure in imagination unless there is a discussion to clarify the situation. If the government knows where it is going it should let parliament know. Silence now can only lead to uncertainty, the financial consequences of which are bound to be something we have not seen in this country, before. Why does the government not come clean and give us the facts? Why does the minister say that things which have taken place recently make necessary an increase in taxation to meet a situation which has been developing and expanding at a galloping rate for the last year? Why do we have this silence?

I suggest to the government and to you, sir, that this is an occasion when there must be a debate or the results will be damaging to our country to a degree unprecedented in proportion.

● (11:50 a.m.)

Then the minister has the colossal nerve to say the opposition is to blame. We are to blame for daring to ask this government for information. The minister has opened the door; he has drawn back the curtain. Everybody has known that the government has been in difficulties for the last six months, yet the minister has gone his way. Today he announces that next week or some time in the future he is going to let parliament and the people in on the information they have the right to have today.

If ever there was urgency of debate, sir, it is now. There should be no delay until next week in giving this house the information the minister must have. Did the crisis develop while some ministers were almost en route and in flight? They were called home. They are now here. There can be no delay until next week.

What has happened? Why cannot the minister give us today the story of what has taken place in the last few hours which apparently impels him pell-mell to cast parliamentary government overboard? He must know now. We have the right to this information, Mr. Speaker. If ever there was a case made out not only of urgency but urgency of debate, it is this. Wait four or five more days and this country will be in a turmoil.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the former prime minister of this country I shall be very brief. There are two thoughts in connection with