

Oral Questions

Mr. Wilson: I will address my question to the Prime Minister. Will there be a budgetary lockup for Members of Parliament similar to that which has been held for some 30 or 40 years, which will allow Members of Parliament the opportunity to study the contents of the budget and provide them with the means by which they can responsibly respond to the elements of the budget? If these lockup privileges are not to be extended, would the Prime Minister explain why they will not be extended?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the first point I would make is that as far as I know this practice has not existed for 30 or 40 years as the hon. member alleges.

Mr. Nielsen: It has indeed.

Mr. Trudeau: I believe it is a practice which began much more recently, some ten years ago, during my administration. I would be interested in hearing about the precedents or the historic references the hon. member has, which allow him to suggest glibly that the practice has existed for 30 or 40 years.

In so far as the proposal made by the hon. minister is concerned, perhaps the Minister of State for Finance has more recent knowledge than I, but to my knowledge, the offer of the Minister of Finance to the opposition on Friday was that they have an advance copy of the budget and a briefing on it provided they undertake not to break the embargo until after the minister has finished speaking.

Mr. Wilson: Madam Speaker, I am advised that the practice of budget lockups was undertaken when the Hon. Donald Fleming was the minister of finance. I can go no further back than that, but the practice has been in existence for some while, and I think the Prime Minister knows that.

• (1430)

APPLICATION OF RULES

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, may I put a supplementary question. If it is such an important principle for the government to keep Members of Parliament gagged during the time the Minister of Finance is making his speech, why is it that, when the Prime Minister and members of the Liberal Party were in opposition, they left the House of Commons while the former minister of finance, the hon. member for St. John's West, was making his speech? Why the double standard? Why have we changed these rules now, when the Prime Minister himself was following a different practice as leader of the opposition?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, it is true that increasingly this practice of the lockup has been abused by—perhaps by members of both parties. I do not recall the circumstances when the hon. member for St. John's West read his budget, but the Minister of Justice, a former minister of finance, reminds me that it was begun by

the Conservative opposition when he was minister and that it is a practice that is—

Mr. Wilson: Why the double standard?

Mr. Trudeau: The hon. member is asking why there is a double standard. It is not a double standard if it is practised by both sides.

I wish the hon. member would listen to my answer, which is that this practice has been going on for some time. As the Minister of Finance points out, it is certainly not fair to Members of Parliament that the people listening to the electronic media—

Mr. Wilson: Why did you leave?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is asking supplementary questions. It he wants to ask a supplementary question I will sit down and hear it, but if he wants to hear my answer he should at least be polite and listen while I am answering.

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CANADIAN UNITY

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS BY INFORMATION OFFICE

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Justice. The incoming executive director of the Canadian Unity Information Office has said that he has been specifically asked to look into CUIO's practices in awarding contracts. What practices in awarding contracts led the minister to issue that request to the new executive director?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, several questions were raised in committee, and I have asked the new director to ensure that all current practices within the Canadian Unity Information Office are up to standard. That is part of his mandate, and since he was newly appointed, I asked him to make sure that all the usual guidelines were followed under his direction.

[English]

Mr. Beatty: Madam Speaker, specific questions were not asked in committee as they related to the awarding of contracts by CUIO. Perhaps the minister could elaborate on that.

INVOLVEMENT OF EMPLOYEE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question. The new executive director also says that he has been instructed by the minister to review CUIO's guidelines governing the political activities of its employees. Could the minister confirm that he gave three months' notice to Mr. Patrick McDougall, a former employee of CUIO, as a result of his involvement with the Liberal election campaign in the Newfoundland provincial election?