

Oral Questions

I have made it very clear that I am not going to make statements that are going to preclude the attention and the considerations that the finance committee is going to be having, the finance committee of which he is a member.

We have indicated that we want to listen to what the finance committee has to say and draw our conclusions accordingly. But clearly, the proposal that is on the table to which we have indicated a very strong attachment, does not provide for either of those two things in its make-up.

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question, too is to the Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance knows, without exception, all the premiers have opposed the tax.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): What have they proposed?

Mr. Broadbent: He knows also that there is Joe going again. Calm down over there, Joe. I hope our foreign policy is in better control, Your Honour.

• (1430)

Since the First Ministers are here in town, and since the Government of Canada and the premiers ought to obtain maximum co-operation on such a matter, I want to ask the minister this, considering that he said: "Behind closed doors, they'll say, 'You got to go ahead with this'. No question of that. With reference to the tax, they do not want to share the heat, they want to come in later." Will the minister either tell the House of Commons and the people of Canada the name of one premier who said that, or do the right thing and withdraw his comment entirely?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): I think that I have responded to that question in response to the Leader of the Opposition. In those comments on the TV program that was aired last night I was referring to the fact that the finance ministers, federal and provincial, had sat around the table for two years discussing a proposal on sales tax reform, which is the same structure as the goods and services tax. The goods and services tax is a federal only proposal. The other proposal, a national sales tax, is federal-provincial, but all the other elements are essentially the same as what we have been discussing with the provinces.

With the exception of one finance minister, at no time did others say: "Look, we had better stop discussing this". It became quite clear in the way the discussion was going that we were not going to reach a resolution of this; that there was not the need on the part of the provinces to change their sales tax. There was a very clear need on the part of the federal government. That is why we decided to proceed as we have.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding what the minister has said, he still has not answered the question. It is a very serious accusation, I say to the minister, to tell the people of Canada that all the premiers are systematically misleading the public. The premiers have come out strongly with the large majority of Canadians in opposition to the tax. The Minister of Finance has said, and these are his words: "You got to go ahead with this".

Can he name one minister of finance or one premier and, if so, which province, has told him to go ahead with it? Who is saying that in private, but is saying something contrary to the people of Canada? As Minister of Finance, he has a reputation to uphold, and if he is going to hurl abuse at the premiers, he has got to document that.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear in the context of this that what I was referring to is the fact that we have to go ahead with the replacement of the existing federal sales tax to the goods and services tax. That is precisely the position that the New Democratic Party is stating, and you have said on many occasions—

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party is shaking his head. I can show different occasions on which his party, people speaking on behalf of his party, his finance critic from the last Parliament—

Mr. Broadbent: Which premier, Mike?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—was saying that it is important. The member from Regina as well is saying that the existing federal sales tax is a mess, it must be changed, and on this basis we have got to get on with it.

People have been talking about making a change in this tax for 50 years. This is a government that is going to get on with that job.