

Oral Questions

to a Cabinet appointment has been, among other things, a police check and tax check of the potential appointee and a searching verbal examination of the candidate by the Prime Minister himself. These are essential to the integrity of the Government and the morality of the whole system, I suggest.

The Hon. Member for Burin-St. George's now says that in his case no such police or tax check took place. I ask the Prime Minister, is this true? If no such checks took place, why not? If such checks were made, why did his tax problem and potential prosecution not turn up?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is correct that various checks are generally made. They are made either before or after the appointment. The Hon. Member shakes his head. If he will hear me out he will realize it is true that checks are made in the sense that if the Commissioner of the RCMP or Deputy Minister of National Revenue finds that there is something that should be reported to the Prime Minister about a Minister who has been in office a period of time, this report is made. So the checks are made as a matter of course, and they are ongoing.

In this particular case, Madam Speaker, it would have been preferable had I known the results of the checks before the swearing-in of the Hon. Member for Burin-St. George's, but I did not. The Hon. Member yesterday explained the circumstances in which he did not inform me of certain facts, and his justifications were laid before the House. In my case I am sorry that I did not request or await results before proceeding with the appointment. It would probably have saved the Member some embarrassment and myself some embarrassment. But the substance of the matter is that the checks were made and they resulted in the resignation of the Hon. Member, for reasons known.

It is important to underscore the fact that in no sense was the public aggrieved or was the common weal imperiled. As soon as the facts became known, the Hon. Member offered his resignation and I accepted it.

Mr. Lawrence: That is an astounding statement for a Prime Minister to make. Just astounding. What a dereliction of duty.

DEPARTMENT'S DECISION TO INSTITUTE PROSECUTION

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Durham-Northumberland): Madam Speaker, I then ask the Prime Minister how long had the recommendation to prosecute been in the Department of Justice before the decision to prosecute was made? When was the decision to prosecute actually made and when and from whom—obviously now far too late—but when and from whom did the Prime Minister actually become aware of the decision to prosecute?

● (1500)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, but I would perhaps defer to the Minister of Justice to correct me if my facts are wrong, the

decision to prosecute by the Department of Justice was made yesterday or today. I believe the Minister of Justice was informing me earlier that the information had been laid today.

Mr. Crosbie: That is not the question.

Mr. Trudeau: Therefore, they probably made the decision yesterday.

In so far as the further question is concerned, I believe it had to do with when I was aware. I was aware yesterday that they were going to prosecute. I believe that is why the Hon. Member made his statement yesterday. I was made aware about an hour ago that, in fact, they laid the information today.

An Hon. Member: Five charges.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF TAX INFORMATION

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Hon. Member for Burin-St. George's pointed out the law guarantees the confidentiality of income tax information. He alleged that the confidentiality of his information was breached by a senior government official. Has the Prime Minister investigated the Hon. Member's charges, and can he give the House the assurance that no one on his staff was the senior government official to whom the Hon. Member referred?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I cannot give assurance about things that I know not. I can simply say that if the Hon. Member is talking about staff in the Prime Minister's office, they were not aware of any facts before I was. I was made aware by my officials just after they spoke to the Hon. Member from Burin-St. George's at the time the officials met with the Hon. Member. The Member phoned me, as is well known, and offered his resignation. I phoned the Governor General and recommended that he accept it.

I cannot know if the leak came from the Hon. Member. I do not know who would have had the tax information. Certainly my Department does not have the tax information.

The Member would know that it is always a very delicate matter to inquire into the background and records of any Member of Parliament. The principle of the independence of Members of Parliament force us to be very chary of inquiring into the background of any Member of Parliament.

An Hon. Member: Not on the Government benches.

Mr. Trudeau: Certainly I have no taste for doing that. I am sure no members of my staff have the means of doing that.