

Oral Questions

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Right Hon. Member talks about parliamentary practice. Any knowledge that I have of parliamentary practice is that when a budget is delivered in the House of Commons it becomes the budget. Until then it is not a budget. I cannot see by what contortions of mind the former Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to know about a budget leak and some malpractice until he knows what the budget is. Maybe tomorrow he can tear himself away from the campaign trail again, and ask his questions. If there has been a leak, then we will answer that question.

● (1430)

INQUIRY RESPECTING GOVERNMENT'S PURPOSE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, my experience with parliamentary practice has been that Ministers of Finance try to tell the truth. We have apparently had a dramatic departure from that with regard to the absent Minister of Finance today. Presumably the Prime Minister would have known what his Minister was doing. Presumably the Minister of Finance was expressing Government policy. If, when the Minister of Finance held up that document, it was not the truth, what was the purpose of the Government of Canada—to mislead Canadians deliberately as to the contents of the budget, because that was the consequence? Was that the plan of the Government to mislead Canadians deliberately as to the contents of the budget, or did the Minister of Finance breach rules of budget secrecy which, in any self respecting Government, would cause him to submit his resignation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, how can the former Leader of the Opposition suspect that the Minister deliberately, to use his words, "tried to mislead the Canadian public"? There was a photo opportunity in his room—

Mr. Dick: An ego trip.

Mr. Trudeau: —which is something that I understand is long standing practice.

Miss MacDonald: To give it to the press.

Mr. Trudeau: It was the practice when the Minister of Finance sat on the other side. It was practised under earlier Ministers of Finance. It is something that is meant to permit the press to prepare themselves for budget night and to have advance pictures and so on.

Mr. Dick: An ego trip.

Mr. Trudeau: If the Hon. Member opposite who is saying "ego trip" is suggesting that there should be less communication with the press, I would support that point of view.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An Hon. Member: The Minister was seen buying shoes in Saturday's papers. He does not need three or four photo opportunities.

Mr. Trudeau: Obviously not everybody can be expected to have as small an ego as I have.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: But Ministers of Finance have followed that practice. They have judged there would be a certain code of honour that would be respected when there is a photo opportunity. Hon. Members can reach their conclusions as to what happened. But to say, as the Leader of the Opposition hypothesizes, that the Minister of Finance was trying to mislead the public, is really only the result of a twisted mind. Obviously the Minister of Finance did not have the press in his room in order to tell the Canadian public some information from which they could then go out and profit.

Mr. Taylor: Your nose is getting bigger all the time.

USE OF CAMERA ZOOM LENSES

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, if it was not the purpose of the Minister of Finance to have communicated the contents of the document, which he described as the budget, why did he call journalists into his room? Why did he open the budget? Why did he ask them if they had their zoom lenses ready, if he did not want the contents of that document to be broadcast across the country and to be taken as an indication of what was going to be in the budget?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member asks why he did that. I suppose he trusts all members of the press more than I would. I do not know if the Hon. Member would do it, but I would not have done that.

RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTER

Mr. Gordon Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Madam Speaker, perhaps we can leave the comedy hour now and show some concern for the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gilchrist: I would like to address my question to the Prime Minister. If in spite of the smoke and mirrors of whether the document is or is not a budget, does the Prime Minister understand that stock markets deal a great deal with perception, and does the Prime Minister understand that for every one cent the Canadian dollar declines, our debt to foreign nations goes up about \$120 million? Whether the document was or was not the budget, does the Prime Minister consider the action of the Minister of Finance to be a responsible act and one that is worthy of the person supposedly leading the country through these difficult economic times?