

Minister to be informed especially of major capital projects such as this and the obvious ball-up in his own government respecting them. In any event, that is past history.

What guarantee can the Prime Minister give to the people of this country, today, that this type of exorbitant overrun in respect of capital projects will not be repeated? We have a \$10 billion program this year. Can the Prime Minister give his guarantee that this will not happen again?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, when the budget of the government is in the order of some \$40 billion—

Mr. Stevens: Fifty billion.

Mr. Trudeau:—it is not surprising that there shall be some instances of regrettable financial accounting or expenditure control. This would exist, and indeed it does exist, in any large corporation. The difference with the Government of Canada is that we have an Auditor General who pinpoints these publicly. He is an Auditor General who is chosen by parliament to do this very job.

● (1117)

The hon. member wants to know what guarantees there will be in the future. I could say there has been no time in the past one hundred years since we have had auditors general that he did not, in every government, of whatever stripe, find some instances of neglect.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Not of this kind.

Mr. Trudeau: If the right hon. member for Prince Albert wants to get into the act, I welcome him, because I see that his successor is not in his seat. I am sure that, in his absence, he would welcome the right hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Don't be childish all the time.

Mr. Trudeau: I am very willing to answer questions, but out of deference I am asking the right hon. member to say that the auditor general never found any concern over spending during the time he was in office.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT CONCERNING DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Mr. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister. I do not want to disturb his serenity: he just had a cabinet shuffle of the lost souls. It is a question of the quick leading the dead.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister this: very serious charges have been made by officials of the Department of Transport against ministers. I refer the Prime Minister to page 539 of the Auditor General's report, where officials of the Department of Transport state that recognition of the political process is not evident in the reports on the choice of sites for the training institute and the motor vehicle test centre, or Toronto or Calgary airports. I quote:

Oral Questions

The early commitments made by ministers based on circumstances extraneous to the department were particularly significant in the decisions on the timing, location, size and scope of these projects. The strength of these early commitments made it difficult to contain projects at later stages.

In view of these serious charges, is the Prime Minister going to ask for the resignation of his ministers of transport since 1972? Or if he will not do that, will he at least have a public inquiry into these charges by officials of the Department of Transport against their ministers over the past six years?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report has been referred, as the hon. member perhaps noticed yesterday, to the public accounts committee. The hon. member can use his rapier wit at that particular committee to show how bright he is at reading texts from the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Crosbie: It is not rapier, Mr. Speaker; it is rape of the political process.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: It is not a matter of the public accounts committee; it is a charge of political interference which caused the waste of hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars. In those circumstances, does the Prime Minister agree that the matter to which I referred, and the charges made by these officials of the Department of Transport, reproduced by the Auditor General, as their explanation of these increases, warrants more than a public accounts committee but, in fact, a public inquiry with proper powers of subpoena and complete independence from the government? Will the Prime Minister not realize the seriousness of this?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do not share the hon. member's contempt for the public accounts committee. I think they do a good job.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, because of the dance of the macabre this morning, the Prime Minister will not take this matter seriously. The public accounts committee does not have power: it is in the hands of the majority; it is controlled by the Liberal majority.

An hon. Member: It has your chairman.

Mr. Crosbie: The chairman is independent, but he is one of a minority. The Prime Minister and his ministers have referred to the Auditor General in glowing terms. Will the Prime Minister investigate this serious matter, or try to forget it as he is trying to do? This is a most serious charge. I do not think a previous auditor general's report ever had a department make this kind of statement about its minister and the political interference it suffered. Will the Prime Minister take this seriously and quit joking about the public accounts committee?