

Oral Questions

and I have been having for the last six months. I think we have met with 56 different organizations. The matter on which we met was in the ordinary course of pre-Budget consultations. I suggest that the Hon. Member discuss this with his colleague, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Maybe he could learn a little more about the matter, since the meeting was held in his former law office.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I do not regard that as a serious answer.

PURPOSE OF MEETING

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): The fact of the matter is that, according to spokesmen for the Minister's office, the Budget has largely been printed. Is this the same charade that the Secretary of State for External Affairs took us through? If the meeting was not to discuss what might be in the Budget, what was it for? Why would the Minister hold a meeting at this particular time?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Budget is not printed. This particular meeting was originally scheduled back in January or February. It was a meeting with a group which was established originally in 1975 by the Leader of the Opposition. It was just a continuation of discussions that have been going on with previous Ministers of Finance since that time. The only time in which these discussions were not held was in 1982 and 1983 when the then Minister of Finance did not want to discuss the particular matter.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL COMMITMENT—ELECTION PROMISE

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Science and Technology. In June of 1984 the Progressive Conservative Campaign Handbook, which included the promises by the Conservatives for the 1984 election, stated:

A Progressive Conservative Government will make up the ground Canada has lost in technological research and development through:

Doubling our national commitment to R&D from 1.3% of Gross National Product (GNP) to 2.5% of GNP within the first four years we are in office.

Earlier this week the Minister stated:

We cannot promise that by 1990 we will have moved to the point of 2.5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, when is a promise not a promise? Will the Minister now agree that the Government has abandoned the promise it made in the election campaign of doubling R and D within its first four years in office?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the usual NDP version of a political commitment is that it is a matter of the public sector

promising to hand out vast amounts of public resources to accomplish a goal.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: That was your promise.

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate a little tolerance from the Opposition if they wish to hear the answer.

The Government remains committed to achieving a level of national expenditure on research and development approaching that of our major industrial competitors. I am optimistic that that goal will be reached.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, in June of 1984, less than a year ago, acting on the advice of the then critic for Science and Technology, the present Minister, the Progressive Conservative Party stated explicitly that it would achieve 2.5 per cent in the first four years, that is, by 1988. Is that now still the promise, or has the Government abandoned that promise and therefore undermined the future of the economy of the country?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is ascribing to myself words which were never uttered.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Siddon: In the question the precise words were not quoted. In fact it is an objective of the Government to raise Canada's investment, in the public and private sectors alike, to a level approaching that of our major industrial competitors, hopefully within the next five years. However, that ultimate goal will be achieved in due course.

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INDUSTRY

EMPLOYEES OF DOMINION STORES IN ONTARIO

Mr. Reg Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. Ninety-three Dominion stores have been sold to A&P and many employees in the remaining stores in Ontario centres such as Scarborough face what some fear is an uncertain future. What action can the Government of Canada take to give these employees the assurance that they will receive fair treatment if any more stores are sold or closed by this company which has a dominion charter?

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, this issue is substantially a provincial matter. At the time of the acquisition of certain stores by A&P we were most concerned about the preservation of jobs. As I recall, over 7,000 jobs were preserved. We will naturally be concerned about the jobs in the remaining stores. I will take