

Oral Questions

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I certainly approve the principle as just stated by the minister in his previous answer. In so far as what was stated this morning, I will inquire and find out what was stated. I can see in the quotation there that it obviously cannot be the policy of the government that every advertisement would have to be approved by Parliament, if that is the meaning of the words that I read. Because the Government of Canada is involved in many forms of advertising, such as recruiting for the armed services and so on, and this does not come before Parliament.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister will know that in the leaked document that outlined the various policies the government would follow to try to manipulate public opinion as we went into the question of constitutional reform, specific reference was made to, and I quote:

● (1420)

—once the government has decided what action it intends to take, and Parliament has been reconvened to debate that proposed action, the role of advertising changes. At that point, public funds are being used to sell the governing party's position—

The memorandum to cabinet then went on to say:

Under these circumstances, ministers need to decide if advertising is politically legitimate.

I wonder if the Prime Minister will tell the House of Commons what was the decision of the Government of Canada on that question of political legitimacy, which was put to ministers by this document?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I would imagine that most ministers, like myself, have not read that document.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: I received it and I can say in all sincerity that it was much too long a document for me to read.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, given the difficulty of the public service, then, in communicating with the Prime Minister, might I suggest that the Prime Minister have this full document sent to whichever advertising agency is working for the Minister of State for Multiculturalism so that he might have prepared a small advertisement to communicate the contents of the government's advice to the government?

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, Madam Speaker, if that is seriously recommended by the opposition I will take that into consideration.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

REPORTED STATEMENT BY MINISTER ON CBC TELEVISION

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, I would like to direct a supplementary question to the minister of state for government propaganda.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I could not think of a more inappropriate Dr. Goebbels, Madam Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: I said inappropriate.

An hon. Member: You or him?

Mr. McGrath: Last night on the CBC national news, according to this transcript, the minister had this to say:

The content of ads should reflect either a policy that has been approved at least in principle in Parliament or widely reflect the views of all sides of the House of Commons. It is my view that it is inappropriate to go and spend the public's money on a view, if it is isolated to one party, albeit that that party is the government party.

If that is the minister's view, if he was accurately reported in that transcript, how then can the minister justify a continuation of this scandalous, outrageous advertising program which is undermining the role of Parliament?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Better listen, Jim.

Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State, Multiculturalism): Madam Speaker, obviously the hon. member does not watch television. I would deny vehemently that there is anything scandalous about communicating to Canadians information on a very important issue, constitutional reform, which leaders of all parties in this House supported strongly during the referendum campaign but seem to have changed their commitment a little since that time.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fleming: The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition seems to want to answer for me.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): He could probably do a better job.

Mr. Fleming: The fact of the matter is that no constitutional ads have been run since September 8.

An hon. Member: What about the billboards?

Mr. Fleming: The billboards will cease. They are under contract. When you purchase billboard space, you have to do it under a time contract and they will end on the fifteenth—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fleming: Madam Speaker, I am glad hon. members are listening, but I wish they would regain their sense of courtesy. I am trying to answer. They have asked me a question and I would like to answer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!