

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Diefenbaker: Who does the interpreting? The Prime Minister?

Mr. Trudeau:—over government spending. We find that this is a very important function, but of course when the Auditor General embarks upon the area of criticizing government policy we feel he is impinging on the rights and duties of the opposition, which perhaps they do not fulfil very well.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, knowing that the President of the Treasury Board was a deputy minister when a former Auditor General found some fault with some horses on the payroll I can understand the sensitivity about the matter, but I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether the view expressed by the President of the Treasury Board that it would be preferable to have another kind of person as Auditor General constitutes government policy?

Mr. Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker. Assuming that that is a correct quotation, I cannot say that this is government policy. I would assume that if that was said it might be interpreted to mean we want another type of function fulfilled by the person who is fulfilling the job now, not some other person.

Mr. Stanfield: One final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether these statements by the President of the Treasury Board and the President of the Privy Council, and the refusal of the Treasury Board to grant the salary classifications requested by the Auditor General for members of his staff so that he can retain the kind of staff he feels he needs to satisfy his obligations to this House, all constitute deliberate harassment of the Auditor General with a view to provoking his resignation?

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Auditor General has a thick enough skin that he would not call this harassment.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Prime Minister the following question: would he or any other member of his cabinet undertake to make a statement to the House indicating in what way and in what respect the Auditor General has gone beyond the authority given to him under the relevant statute? In view of the fact it is important that the Auditor General perform his duty without any cloud over the way in which he performs it, I therefore ask

the Prime Minister whether he would have the courage and the courtesy to tell Parliament and the people of Canada in which respect the Auditor General has exceeded his jurisdiction?

Mr. Trudeau: As stated in those terms, Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the Prime Minister if the government feels it should be the sole arbiter and interpreter of what are the functions and duties of the Auditor General, who is an officer of Parliament and not of the government?

Mr. Trudeau: Obviously not, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General is responsible to Parliament and it will be for Parliament, in the way it desires, to judge his conduct. That will take place in due course. Government members are also Members of Parliament. The opinions as related to me which were expressed by the two ministers of the government had to do not with the function of the Auditor General in checking the accounting procedures of the government with a view to certifying whether or not they are honest and adequate and whether they are proceeded with with proper probity, but with that other function, that of criticizing policy, that of criticizing government decisions, which I think is not one for the Auditor General but for the opposition.

Mr. Baldwin: He has never criticized policy.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. As the Prime Minister has indicated that the Auditor General has criticized government policy and as the words used by the Auditor General which have been criticized by the President of the Treasury Board and by the government House Leader did not indicate any criticism of government policy, would the Prime Minister indicate what policy the Auditor General is accused of condemning?

Mr. Trudeau: When the report comes before the proper parliamentary place we will be delighted to answer that type of question.

Mr. Hees: He has not criticized any government policy. You just don't like your expenditures being criticized, that's all.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I believe the hon. member for York South was deprived of