

question with reference to the same law, in answer to which he indicated general agreement on a point of law, namely, who would or would not have the right to appeal under section 30(1) of the law. That was the earlier question. There was no dispute; no question of interpretation. Just in passing, the Prime Minister indicated acceptance of an interpretation of the law on my part which was part of an earlier question.

Once the Prime Minister indicated that he agreed with that conclusion, my question to him was not concerning an interpretation of the law, but given the agreement on the point of law which was shared by the Prime Minister and myself, this was the force, if not the exact words, of my question. I asked did he not agree that it was desirable for the government to bring forward amendments to the law in order to change it so that the grievance or injustice perceived by myself and other vis-à-vis workers who are excluded from having a right of appeal might be changed? My question did not ask for an interpretation of law; it did not indicate that I was concerned about the interpretation of the law. I wanted the Prime Minister to indicate that the government might be prepared to change the law.

● (1520)

I suggest that Your Honour might reconsider your previous ruling. I know the Prime Minister at the time was rising to his feet to answer the question. If you decide that he may answer, perhaps the Prime Minister would do so.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. With all due respect, I do not think the opportunity to reconsider is given to me. I felt that the hon. member was asking about two matters with which I had some difficulty. He asked for an expression of opinion, as to whether certain rights lie with certain people under the terms of the law; further, whether it was the opinion of the Prime Minister that something further might be done about that. I confess that I rarely interfere with questions, particularly those asked each day by lead-off members of each party. I may have been influenced in my approach to the particular matter today, in deciding that this was a matter for debate rather than a matter for the question period, by the fact that I knew, and hon. members had no way of knowing, that I intended to rule in favour of a debate on the whole matter this evening. It is not something I would take as a general indication or precedent.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. May I ask if, to Your Honour's knowledge, the estimates have been tabled and if we are entitled to a copy at this time from which to prepare our questions?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I am under the impression that I am to make a statement and receive comments before tabling the document. However, since someone has taken the document to the table, I can only say this: if the authorities at the table want to distribute copies of the estimates, that is their privilege. They are not under my control.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It would be my understanding that the document now having been tabled, it ought to be distributed to hon. members forthwith. In accordance

Main Estimates

with the earlier agreement of the House, the House will now revert to statements by ministers.

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[Translation]

MAIN ESTIMATES, 1976-77

STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT OF TREASURY BOARD

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the main estimates for 1976-77, which I am tabling today, amount to \$38.4 billion for budgetary items and \$1.1 billion for non-budgetary items.

[English]

Mr. Crouse: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As chairman of the public accounts committee, I have more than a passing interest in the figures to be tabled today. Can those figures be made available? I see that the page is now distributing copies of the documents to hon. members.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that the hon. member's point of order was dealt with seconds ago. Copies of the document are now being distributed.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, representatives of the three opposition parties will receive information which will allow them to comment on my statement.

[Translation]

They include for the first time old age security and guaranteed income supplement payments, which in other years were paid out of a special account.

Throughout the current fiscal year, I have continued to state the government's intention to hold the growth of expenditures between 1974-75 and 1975-76 to 16 per cent or less. I am pleased to say that there now is every indication this target will be achieved. This has been done, in the face of strong inflationary pressures, only through the exercise of great restraint on new expenditures, and through the actual reductions in previously approved expenditures which I announced last June. The 16-per-cent increase in federal expenditures during 1975-76 compares favorably with a number of recent indicators for the private sector of the Canadian economy. During the third quarter of 1975, for example, business non-residential construction and business investment in machinery and equipment were expanding at annual rates of 18 and 16 per cent respectively; the growth of personal expenditures on consumer goods and services reached 14.3 per cent during the same quarter.

[English]

I now state my intention to keep the increase in federal expenditures under the ceiling of 16 per cent again in 1976-77. In both cases—that is, in the result now expected to be achieved for 1975-76 and in the intended result for 1976-77—I mean all expenditures, including the non-budgetary items which do not appear in the main estimates.

It will not be easy to reach this target during the coming fiscal year. While it is to be hoped that inflationary pressures will abate, they will still remain strong. Aside from the upward drift in the cost of inputs from rental payments to materials, equipment and supplies which federal departments and agencies, like other economic agents, will have to bear in 1976-77, the main estimates reflect the