

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and am grateful for the minister's explanation. I would now like to ask about a second meeting he had this week, this time with native people, when he more or less promised them a new federal-provincial meeting that would include provincial premiers and native people. The minister will recall that the last time this was tried, Quebec did not attend the conference. Before making this promise to native people, did the minister consult the premier of Quebec to ensure he would be present? If he did not, why is he taking that risk?

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, this must be a record, because once again, the hon. member's information is incorrect. Twice in one day.

What I told the native people during a very frank conversation, and despite media reports, the meeting was a constructive one. What I said was that our preference was for a federal-provincial conference. I said that because it is important for the native people to know that if a federal-provincial conference is held, it is essential that they attend. I also said, and these were my words: "that is our preference". However, it would be impossible without a firm and genuine commitment to making changes in several areas. It is an indication of the complexity of the situation, and a commitment to native people to fully involve them in the constitutional process.

**Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel):** Mr. Speaker, this was a long answer to avoid telling us whether or not he consulted Premier Bourassa.

[*English*]

As a supplementary question I would like to refer to a statement that the minister made last night on national television. I refer to the part of his interview where he said, talking about First Ministers' Conferences: "We would prefer to have one because we know how to make one of those work".

**An hon. member:** Behind closed doors.

**Mr. Ouellet:** He surely does, especially the last one.

I want to know from the minister why he is ready to say yes to a process that involves 11 men behind closed doors and not to say yes instead to a process through a national

referendum where all the people of Canada will be participating in this constitutional process.

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, this is really quite extraordinary. If I well understand the position that is being put forward by the spokesman on constitutional matters of the Official Opposition, he appears to be suggesting that an agreement on a Constitution should not include the elected governments of Canada.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Clark (Yellowhead):** Well, he said it should not include the elected representatives in Canada, but should be decided by a national referendum.

Is that the position of the Liberal Party? He might well want to take a look at the language that he used in the question he put. It is the clear implication that I took from it.

We believe it is necessary for there to be some mechanism by which there can be participation by the people of the country in these decisions. We also believe that at some point in time it is going to be necessary for governments to come together and to formally agree with some of the changes that we are discussing here. It is not possible now for any of us to say how that might occur and what exact form that might take.

Certainly it would not be the position of this government to suggest that the role of provinces could be put aside and their place taken by a national referendum.

**Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs as well.

The minister will know that the provincial governments of Quebec and British Columbia, to name just two, are committed to having referenda in their respective jurisdictions on constitutional proposals.

Will the minister now honour his promise on legislation for a national referendum and allow Canadians from all regions of this country to participate in this most important process of nation building?

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs):** My promise, Mr. Speaker, was that there would be a meeting this week of House leaders to discuss the timetable that the government might have in mind for legislation to give effect to our undertaking in the Speech from the Throne. Of course, we will respect that undertaking.