

Oral Questions

government. We know from last week that the finance minister is planning to negotiate and discuss new fiscal arrangements with the provinces and we have a number of committees and commissions that are now studying the constitutional issue.

My question to the Acting Prime Minister is simply this. Will he commit today, on behalf of this government, that there will be no negotiations with any one province or any group of provinces until the Canadian people have been heard and until all of the commissions and committees have reported?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, there will be no such commitment. The government will carry on in the normal way dealing with the provinces of Canada with respect to fiscal matters as well as others. The fiscal agreements that the hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party is referring to are not routine exactly, but matters of regular government business. A five-year term of the equalization agreement expires next year and there are going to be a series of discussions and negotiations with the provinces on fiscal agreements between the Government of Canada and the provinces, that is from a fiscal point of view, rather than a constitutional point of view.

No one is suggesting any change in jurisdiction. This is a matter of a transfer of funds from the Government of Canada to the provinces. We will be continuing to carry out the business of Canada in the normal manner, as the people of Canada expect.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that the government assure Canadians that there are no negotiations that are going on on a bilateral basis that will affect future constitutional talks. I would also in the same aspect like to raise another matter.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister said that the deputy ministers meet to advise the government on national unity. Will the Prime Minister or the government immediately table in the House the terms of reference given the deputy ministers? Can he also give us the assurance that the final product will be tabled in the House and made available to all Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing unusual in that the procedure that has been adopted with respect to advice to the government on constitutional matters. Deputy ministers of the government are there to administer government departments and to give the government advice.

The Prime Minister has sought the advice of certain or all of the deputy ministers of the government in connection with possible constitutional negotiations and they will give the government their advice when they have completed their work.

There are no terms of reference that can be tabled here today. The results of the advice given to the government will be used by the Prime Minister and members of the government insofar as they think the advice is the kind that should be followed by the government. As events proceed, we will see what advice the government is acting upon.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I think if anything is clear from ongoing constitutional negotiations in Canada, it is that this has to be a constitutional round for all Canadians. The court ruling by the B.C. Supreme Court last week against the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en raised a lot of questions again for people about aboriginal title and aboriginal rights, particularly in that ruling suggesting they do not apply in B.C.

I think what this means is that this government must give a commitment to all Canadians indeed in this round of constitutional talks we have an urgency to deal with outstanding aboriginal issues and it must be done in this round. This must be a round for all Canadians.

Can the Acting Prime Minister assure this House that aboriginal issues will be a substantial part of this constitutional round of talks?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, this constitutional round, it is agreed I believe on all sides, is for all Canadians, all provinces, all issues and all of those who have an interest, including the aboriginal groups in Canada. Aboriginal interests and issues will certainly be a part of the discussions that take place in this constitutional round. That has been made clear.