

The Constitution

ing, through the opposition House leader, was that the agreement would be at least to February 6 because of the avalanche—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chrétien: Yes or no.

Mr. Nielsen: —of oral applications and written briefs. I believe the number of oral applications amounts to some 350 and the written applications amount to a like amount, for a total of some 700 or 800 applications to be dealt with. I know that the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) went into that meeting with the thought uppermost in his mind which was stated by our leader yesterday when leaving caucus. He said, and I quote from a transcript, which was sent to the government House leader and to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) of that exchange between our leader and members of the media:

I understand the question of exact dates is under discussion among House leaders and it will continue that way, but there was a unanimous view on the part of my colleagues in the House of Commons that we want the people of Canada to be heard on the Constitution of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: While we gladly accept the motion which is before us now waiting to be read to the House, we must file the caveat that should this backlog of Canadians who want to be heard on their constitution—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cousineau: Blackmail.

Mr. Siddon: You don't want to hear Canadians?

Mr. Nielsen: —remain a serious backlog when February 6 rolls around—in other words, if there are still hundreds of responsible organizations and individuals who want to be heard—we are simply reserving the right to raise the matter again with an appeal to the government to be reasonable so that these Canadians can be heard on their constitution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1510)

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I should like to say that we welcome the statement that the government House leader has made on this point of order. I should like to add that although we have had our difficulties, which always happens where there are negotiations, we have done very well at negotiating in the last little while. We even managed yesterday to hold our meeting in a place where the members of the press could not find us—

An hon. Member: Stanley's office.

Mr. Knowles: —and I do not think they know yet where we held that meeting.

As for the proposal that the government House leader has made, and as for his statement, they correspond to my understanding, namely, that if the government was prepared to agree to the date of February 6, the minister would be free to stand in the House and announce it, but that if the government did not agree to the date of February 6, we would be informed as House leaders and the negotiations would be off.

My understanding at yesterday's meeting was that, so far as the opposition was concerned, we would not consider any earlier date, such as January 30 or January 23, but that we would consider February 6. It was also made clear that there were, in both parties on the opposition side, members who wanted a longer period, but that we would agree to the date of February 6 without debate. I congratulate the government on agreeing to this sensible proposal.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The House has heard the proposal put forward by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard). Is there unanimous consent to presenting this motion without debate?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Does the House agree to the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc).

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I wish to rise on a brief point of order.

Madam Speaker: I have notice from the minister that he wishes to reply to an hon. member. Is the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) rising on a point of order which should be heard before we hear the minister? If so, I will recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

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POINT OF ORDER

MR. CLARK—PROPOSAL RESPECTING CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my point of order is one that flows directly from the procedure to which the House has just agreed. I simply want to express my regret that we were not able to receive from the government House leader an indication of the contents of the proposal which he was going to make at three o'clock. I think it would have facilitated arrangements in the House and an understanding of what exactly was going to be proposed if it had been brought forward as a proposal rather than as a surprise.