

Oral Questions

to take the system put in place by the Conservatives and improve it to have better evaluation of programs, to be sure that taxpayers' money is being well spent and that the various regions of the country are being properly communicated with. I think that anybody who is thoughtful about the state of our country would probably agree that we have a real problem in communicating with each other and making Canadians well aware of how their federal tax dollars are spent.

We are a major participant in the Canadian economy. Collectively the provincial governments spend far more than we do, but I make no apology, and I certainly did not see any indication that the previous government would act any differently from the way we have.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, what precipitated my question was my looking at Supplementary Estimates B which were tabled by the government. Those estimates reveal an increase at least of \$26,925,000 on advertising this year alone, and an increase, for example, for the Canadian Unity Information Office of \$15,172,000. That is more than the dominion spent in the first year of confederation totally. There is an increase of \$9,555,000 for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. There is a threefold increase in each of the instances I have mentioned.

Is it the position of the government that the press gallery here is simply doing an incompetent job of explaining to the Canadian people what is happening, or does the government take the position that the Canadian people are a little slow and have to have this kind of direction from the government? What is the reason for this Orwellian increase and the 1984 mentality of this government?

Mr. Fleming: Madam Speaker, there is a certain element of hypocrisy in the hon. member's question. At the moment we have two out-front Conservative governments and one pseudo-Conservative government at the provincial level advocating positions of their governments, not endorsed by their legislatures largely, spending taxpayers' money in putting forward positions, which is something I pledged we would not do.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Precipitated by you.

Mr. Fleming: That is not true. What we are doing is what I said we would do when I was questioned some weeks ago, and that is communicate to the Canadian public the programs of the Government of Canada endorsed by this Parliament. That is all we are doing, and that is what we should be doing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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THE CONSTITUTION

INQUIRY WHETHER LETTER RECEIVED FROM NATIONAL
INDIAN BROTHERHOOD REQUESTING DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Given

the Prime Minister's repeated assurance that native people would be participants in the process of constitutional change in all matters affecting them, and given the government's failure to involve native people prior to drafting the proposed resolution on the constitution, could the Prime Minister confirm that he has received a letter from the president of the National Indian Brotherhood requesting an early meeting to discuss the constitution, and would the Prime Minister indicate whether he has agreed to such a meeting and, if not, why not?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, according to the information I have received from the responsible minister, the government has offered the native groups some \$1.4 million to research their constitutional claims. There have been repeated meetings with officials and with the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and very recently there have been meetings at the official level. I have in correspondence with the native leaders indicated that I would be prepared to meet with them at some point when in their own preparation they felt they had some specific proposal to put to the government.

Mr. Manly: Madam Speaker, the government's position always seems to be that it is willing to throw money to the native people so that they can hold a meeting among themselves. They would like to have a meeting before the end of November at which time their all-chiefs conference is being held so that they can discuss the constitution now during this first stage.

● (1150)

Could the Prime Minister indicate whether he is aware of the anger and the frustration of Indian, Métis and Inuit people because their rights have been completely ignored in the proposed charter of rights? How does he think native people can be effective participants in this first stage of constitutional change which directly affects their basic rights?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, it is not correct to say that they have been completely ignored. The resolution before the committee refers to their rights not being changed in any way. The precise definition of those rights in a written constitutional document is something, I repeat, that we have assisted the Indians, native people, Métis and Inuit to research for themselves. If they come up with some form of amendment which is acceptable to all parties in this House—and I should say hopefully to several of the provincial governments—we are prepared to accept amendments on this as on other things.

I would merely want to point out to the hon. member that I think the simple claim of aboriginal rights, without anyone knowing exactly what it means, is not a matter which one can convincingly argue should be put in the constitution at this time. First of all, the courts would be called upon to interpret such a constitutional amendment, and I think everyone would want to know what aboriginal rights are, what are their extent, to whom they apply, and so on.