

If that could be made clear and if I could have the assurance from the Leader of the New Democratic Party that he would not entertain, after the Supreme Court ruling, assuming that it is favourable, another long debate on other long amendments which would change the nature of the subject matter referred to the Supreme Court, I would say on behalf of our party that we would be prepared to accept a House ruling stating those very things, if we could get agreement from all parties in this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

POSITION OF OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues, and I would hope all members on this side of the House, we see that as a genuine concession by the Prime Minister in the direction of consensus building.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: My Conservative colleagues—some, not all—are laughing. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition said:

Of course, we will be bound by what the courts decide and if they upheld Mr. Trudeau, we would be able to act pretty quickly in Parliament.

Given that fact, and the fact that today the Prime Minister has indicated the government's willingness to accept this kind of proposal which would enable us to terminate this serious debate and get on with other matters, I would ask the government House leader, and I have to put this question to him because of the rules of the House, whether, following the discussions this morning, there has been any report back from the official opposition as to whether they will accept these conditions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker. I would point out to the hon. member that we are not in the habit of making public the nature of discussions held during meetings of parliamentary House leaders. However, since the question is being raised by the leader of a party and since no one would be harmed if I were to reveal what was discussed, I can say that this morning's meeting was held to clear up a few points and no one has made a decision yet.

I believe it is still possible that we will meet again later today to find out the reactions to a much more definite and much clearer proposition than the one made yesterday, including that suggested and proposed by the Progressive Conservative Party. For the time being I am unable to say whether that party accepts or rejects the proposition made by the New Democratic Party. In any event it is not up to me to answer for them, they can do that, but if they would prefer to hold more talks I am at their disposal and at the disposal of the New Democratic Party House leader; another meeting might be

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called later today to hold discussions and further negotiations in an attempt to reach agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, since the Conservative party has proved itself quite adept at raising points of order, perhaps at the appropriate time today the Leader of the Opposition will use that opportunity to outline his party's position.

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THE ECONOMY

DECLINE IN REAL WAGES—MINISTER'S ADVICE TO EMPLOYEES

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, I would like to turn now from the subject of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the New Democratic Party hijacking the country, to a different question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1440)

Mr. Crosbie: My question is to the Minister of Finance. We have been waiting 13 months, the whole term of this government, for some economic action from the government. The minister's department has reported that over the last four years real wages have declined in excess of 6 per cent, and has suggested that the government attempt to convince the public of the necessity of accepting something less in real wages in the current circumstances. In light of this advice from his department to him, and in light of the minister's firm stance against inflation, is he continuing to advise employees against attempting to get wage settlements which exceed the inflation rate or that provide for any catch-up? Is that part of the minister's policy to fight inflation?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I believe the threat of inflation is still the foremost economic difficulty the country faces. It is still my view that it is necessary to exercise restraint in wage settlements unless we want to give further impulse to even higher inflation in 1981. That view has been made clear more than once by myself, and it is obviously evident to all concerned that acceleration in wage settlements would lead inevitably to even greater pressure on the cost of living index.

Mr. Crosbie: Madam Speaker, the minister then is stating it is the government's policy and its advice to the labour segment of our society, or everybody who is employed, that he does not want wage or salary settlements this year in excess of the rate of inflation or to provide for catch-up as part of his anti-inflationary stance.

On February 23 the minister made a statement in Montreal to the Canadian Club in which he said that Canadian workers had no "inalienable" right to better wages, pensions or benefits, and that this could only come from "increased economic growth". Economic growth last year was only 0.1 per cent, and