

present situation in which the Acting Prime Minister refuses to state the position of the government of Canada on the position of this parliament in resolving the national unity problem. Since the Acting Prime Minister will not extend to this House the courtesy which he extended to a radio station earlier this morning when he answered there a question he refuses to answer in this House, let me try with another question. Let me ask if it is the intention of the government of Canada to convene immediately a meeting of first ministers, to call upon the continuing advice of the premiers of the various provinces of Canada concerning means to strengthen and reform the federal system?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any such plan to call a meeting of first ministers.

Mr. Paproski: What do you know? Resign.

An hon. Member: You don't look any too happy, Allan.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the House of Commons would be like if Allan MacEachen were alive.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: That was nasty, Joe. You are getting careless.

PROPOSED PROGRAM OF CHEAP TRAVEL TO PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, let me try another question. In his 1976 annual report the Commissioner of Official Languages proposed that the Prime Minister of Canada should meet with the presidents of Air Canada and CNR, to discuss the means by which there could be brought about a massive program of cheap, mass travel for Canadians, to allow Canadians to understand this country better. We know there has been a minor, little program introduced by the Secretary of State. I want to know if the Prime Minister has acted on that particular recommendation of the Commissioner of Official Languages and met with those officials to discuss the possibility of a program which would allow Canadians to better understand our common country.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, to answer that point, the proposals the Leader of the Opposition mentioned are presently under consideration and we hope to be able to make a statement on the point in future.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. My question was, has the Prime Minister met with those presidents?

Mr. Paproski: Why don't you go back to sleep, Allan?

Oral Questions

TASK FORCE ON NATIONAL UNITY—INQUIRY AS TO REPORT

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. Will the special task force on national unity be preparing reports on its work or making recommendations for parliament to consider formally or will it, as set out in its terms of reference, act solely as a private source of advice to the government on unity issues? If it is to report to parliament, will this be done on an interim basis or only at the conclusion of its term of office; or, in fact, is parliament further to be excluded?

Mr. Grafftey: It will report after the referendum.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker, parliament is not to be further excluded. Parliament is presently debating the subject matter.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: That has been the object of several questions. The debate will continue today.

Miss MacDonald: My question concerns the task force or commission.

Mr. MacEachen: The purposes and objects of the task force are to be found in the statement the Prime Minister made yesterday. Certainly, the members of the task force are free to carry out their responsibilities as they desire and if they make reports or statements, surely it is open to members of parliament to become aware of them and take any action which is desired.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): This is incredible!

ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN NATIONAL UNITY ISSUE

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Acting Prime Minister has not said that the task force will report directly to this House and given that the present two-day debate on national unity was forced on the government by this opposition—

An hon. Member: Nonsense!

● (1420)

Miss MacDonald: Indeed it was. Given the obvious reluctance of the Prime Minister to involve this institution in any formal way on the greatest threat to our nation's survival, will the Acting Prime Minister say what he does consider the role of parliament as an institution to be in this issue, if he has considered the question at all?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I should remind the hon. lady that the suggestion that a special debate be held on the subject of national unity was a suggestion by myself on behalf of the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!