

Oral Questions

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

This morning in the constitutional document, the Prime Minister outlined clearly the Conservative Party's perspective of an economy for Canada, moving into the future.

The document talked about financial institutions and fiscal control. It talked about the rights of capital, but it was silent on the initiatives and a proactive approach on employment and on regional inequality. A nation is about more than just the economy, it is about facilitating Canadian families and their future.

• (1430)

The Prime Minister has articulated an economic agenda. Surely, it is equally important to articulate a people agenda.

Will the Prime Minister seriously consider a social charter which would give substance and form to the inherent rights of Canadians?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend refers to a proactive approach. Indeed, she is quite right. In terms of the economy, as I indicated this morning, one cannot segregate developments in the economy from considerations in the Constitution.

That is why I know that she will be well pleased to learn that interest rates have dropped since the budget by almost two percentage points in March. Growth has accelerated to something in the neighbourhood of 5 per cent for the last quarter and inflation next year, if we keep on track, may be down to 3 per cent. That is extremely good news for the kinds of objectives being sought by my hon. friend, namely, job creation and social justice.

With regard to the concept of a social charter which was put forward by the premier of Ontario, I suppose this is something that the committee itself would want to examine to see if it might be advantageous to Canadians in the long term. I do not know. I have not examined his proposals in great detail, but I know that Premier Rae proposes to play a constructive and helpful role in our national debate, and I look forward to his participation and that of my hon. friend.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, this round of constitutional discussion is about the economy, it is about the future of Canada's social programs. This party and myself would like to see us, as a nation, also say that we have a goal of full employment and that our institutions are going to be directed to that end, as well as the other important issues discussed in this proposal.

Among the proposals put forward today was that much of our economic decision-making could be turned over to a council of the federation. Obviously, it is an idea that has to be further explored, because, as is stated in the proposal, it could be taking fundamental economic decisions away from this House and institutionalizing them in an institutionalized back room if we are not careful.

Will the Prime Minister commit to an open process for any economic change that includes full participation of the provinces, the territories as voting members and the aboriginal people who are, of course, acknowledged in his proposals as having self-government in the future?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the proposal with regard to a council of the federation would not have to do with an agency dealing with, as I think the Leader of the New Democratic Party said, most of our economic decisions. What it would focus upon, however, is that wide range of very important areas where there is either no agreement between federal and provincial governments, or where there have been agreements in principle that have not been brought into practice, as is the case with too much of what has happened with regard to the elimination of trade barriers and other things.

I think is a very interesting, important new proposal. I hope it will be looked at seriously by the committee. Certainly, we intend to make it as open as possible, because we think that one of the things we have to do here is open up the budget processes of federal and provincial governments. Open up the processes of federal-provincial consultation, involving both what we are doing and what the provinces are doing and try by the reforms we are proposing to this House and to the Senate, to make these institutions far more accessible to and far more representative of the people of Canada. That kind of openness is exactly what we are seeking.