

Inquiries of the Ministry

Privy Council last Saturday, is it the intention or the policy of the government to delay or indefinitely suspend the efforts they were making during the course of the last parliament to, as it was called, repatriate the Canadian constitution or make it possible for the constitution to be amended in Canada?

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker, the President of the Privy Council made no such suggestion in his speech, and I have had the pleasure of reading the full text. If there is delay in this matter, Mr. Speaker, it is not delay on the part of the federal government.

Mr. Harkness: Newspaper reports indicate that this was the statement made by the President of the Privy Council. I wonder if the President of the Privy Council could make a copy of this speech available to members so we can see what he did say?

Hon. Guy Favreau (President of the Privy Council): I will do that with pleasure.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Royal): I wonder what aspect of parliamentary courtesy was in the minister's mind when he made a major policy announcement at a political meeting at Montreal, in the light of current discussions on this very subject?

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): May I ask a supplementary question. Does the Prime Minister agree with the reported view of the President of the Privy Council, that the formula which bears his name is now a dead letter and should not be proceeded with?

Mr. Pearson: I agree with what the minister said. If my hon. friend will read the text which will be submitted to him I think he will agree with it, too.

Mr. Lambert: May I ask a further supplementary question in this regard. Is it the Prime Minister's contention that the newspaper reports of this speech are erroneous?

Mr. Pearson: They are in part erroneous.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May I bring to the attention of the hon. member the fact that it is not in order to ask the hon. gentleman if a newspaper report is correct or erroneous.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): I should like to ask the Prime Minister a further supplementary question. Does he agree with the President of the Privy Council that it is proper to delay consideration of the reform of

[Mr. Harkness.]

the Canadian constitution as long as this parliament is dominated by sentimental colonialism?

Mr. Pearson: The statement was not made in that form, as my hon. friend will realize if he reads the text of the speech.

Mr. Heward Graffey (Brome-Missisquoi): This is not a supplementary question, but it is directed to the Prime Minister. It is based on the declaration made this week end by the President of the Privy Council to the effect that the government will not proceed with constitutional reform until the B and B report has been completed. My question of the Prime Minister simply follows that. In preparation for the ultimate meeting with the provinces in this regard, is the government considering the advisability of the establishment here in Ottawa of an all-party parliamentary constitutional committee which, amongst other things, could meet with similar bodies in our provincial capitals?

Mr. Pearson: I agree, Mr. Speaker, that this is a very important matter. I agree, as the President of the Privy Council stated in his speech, that we should proceed with great care. I believe there should be a great deal of preparation before the question of revision comes before any conference. This preparation has already begun in the government.

Mr. Graffey: May I re-emphasize this aspect. Does the government not feel it would be wise to seriously consider the establishment of such a parliamentary committee?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[Later:]

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): I wish to direct a question to the President of the Privy Council regarding this speech which was so misrepresented. Did the President of the Privy Council receive any advice from the premier of Quebec or any of the ministers in the province of Quebec that in so far as the formula is concerned it is a dead duck, to use that expression? What is the reason for the somersault in the minister's own ideas and in his own thinking, as evidenced by that speech?

Mr. Favreau: Mr. Speaker, whatever expressions might have been used, I never received any such advice from either the premier of Quebec or any of his ministers, and I have not had occasion to discuss the question of constitutional amendment with him this year.