

Oral Questions

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Yes, Mr. Speaker, if I am provided a certain latitude in the House, I could outline specifically six points that were made in the meeting that took place this morning. With the consent of the House, I would be prepared to table the letter.

Essentially, the undertaking by the federal government was to ensure that a federal-aboriginal process, which set the agenda for First Ministers' conferences, would be established, and that the First Ministers' conference with respect to aboriginal affairs, which was alluded to in the document of June 9, would be accelerated.

The second commitment by the Government of Canada was to full constitutional recognition of the aboriginal peoples as a fundamental characteristic of Canada.

Third, there is an undertaking to have representatives of the aboriginal peoples participate in any future First Ministers' conference held to discuss the recognition clause, or the Canada clause, as it has become to be referred.

Fourth, the Prime Minister would invite aboriginal peoples to further future First Ministers' conference where matters involving aboriginal concerns are directly affected. They would be able to participate at those conferences.

Fifth, a joint definition of treaty rights would be established. Finally, the federal government proposed to establish a royal commission on native affairs which would be broad and comprehensive in dealing with the various issues affecting the aboriginal community.

My understanding is that following this meeting, the chiefs met to consider the proposals. I understand that they are holding a press conference right at this very moment. Our preliminary indication is that they are rejecting this as a move to break the log-jam and they will be expressing a view that they are not interested in pursuing these discussions further.

[Translation]

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): In the light of this possible answer from the native leaders, I ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the government's next

step will be, because it is a very serious situation, one that was created by the government, and the Canadian people are asking for a concrete response.

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, if I were the Leader of the Opposition, I would not be so quick to level blame.

There is a process going on. The undertaking that was agreed to and signed by the First Ministers of June 9 indicated they would use every possible effort to achieve the passage of the Meech Lake Accord by June 23, 1990. I should remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that this is really a matter for the Manitoba Legislature to consider.

• (1420)

There is a procedural problem that is currently under way, and we hope that the Legislature of Manitoba will work towards the achievement of the undertaking that was signed by the premier of that province. I think all we can do is help and facilitate the Manitoba Legislature. That is precisely what we are doing.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect a more precise and meaningful response to the question as to exactly what the government intends to do if the concerns of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs cannot be met by the June 23 date. It is time for the government to become a lot clearer on how it intends to deal with this situation.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, any time an hon. member prefaces his or her question with the word "if", it becomes a bit of a hypothetical situation.

In fairness, given the delicacy of this particular issue, I think it would be most inopportune to speculate as to what might or might not happen. There is an undertaking agreed to by all First Ministers that they will use their best efforts in passing the Meech Lake Accord by the deadline. We can only assume that that commitment is still firm. We have every reason to believe that it is, and we have every reason and hope that that will be proceeded with.