

Constitutional Renewal

Having made these general observations about the substantial progress that now seems to be under way, I want to conclude with a minor but critical observation. No other democratic nation in the modern world has left to such a small number of people—in this case 11—the serious task of making the decisions which will reshape the nature of a democratic state. While unquestionably wishing those 11 individuals every success, on behalf of my colleagues I should like to say that I profoundly wish that the people who met yesterday had found a more effective manner of involving substantially more Canadians in this very important democratic process.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Is it agreed that the documents referred to by the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) be tabled at this time and appended to *Hansard*?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[*Editor's Note: For documents above referred to, see Appendix.*]

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, during my response to the Prime Minister I referred to the expectations that will surround the meeting in September and I quoted a passage from his statement today which I found surprising. I wonder if the Prime Minister could tell the House whether he is in a position to say categorically that all the first ministers at yesterday's meeting accept the September meeting as a deadline for decision on all or a great majority of the 12 items?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the best answer I could give would be to refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the House to the calendar for future meetings which I have just tabled and of which the Leader of the Opposition has a copy. Under September 8 to September 12 we read that the first ministers in open conference will meet in Ottawa to finalize agreements on work under way, and to put in train a further work program. These words were not the words of the federal government, Madam Speaker. The words we had in our first draft were: "to reach conclusions on work under way". In my view, they had the same meaning because we always talked of the urgency of making decisions by September. But it was at the request of some of the premiers that I put in the document that was accepted by us the words "finalize agreements." This indicates, it seems to me, a clear intention to consider that meeting final as regards the list that we then have before us, because it goes on to say that we will put in train a further work program.

● (1520)

This being said, I would not want the Leader of the Opposition or indeed any of the premiers to think that I am trying to impose on them a deadline if they do not want to accept that deadline. The Leader of the Opposition quotes a statement by one premier which seems to contradict that. All I can say is that that was not my impression of the meeting yesterday.

Several of us, indeed, on the contrary, made it quite clear—several of us, I repeat—that we had to have action by September, much as the Leader of the New Democratic Party has just indicated on behalf of his own party; otherwise there would be catastrophic consequences for the future of the country. So there is, I can certainly say, a large consensus to consider that a deadline, but I would take no exception if some premier would plead that he is not personally part of that consensus.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I think this important, and I am pleased that we have the undertaking from the Prime Minister that he will do nothing to try to impose a deadline upon the discussions which is not agreeable to the other participants in yesterday's meeting.

Mr. Trudeau: I did not give that undertaking.

Mr. Clark: The Prime Minister said he did not give that undertaking. I thought he said quite explicitly, Madam Speaker, that he would not impose a deadline. Perhaps, then, the Prime Minister can tell us whether or not he believes that he has an agreement from the other first ministers participating yesterday that the decision at the meeting in September will be a meeting to finalize agreement on all 12 items or simply to finalize agreement on those subjects on which agreement has been reached by the committee of ministers or "fonctionnaires" of the public servants meeting through the summer.

The word "finalize" as it appears in the communiqué could have very different meanings. Since there is a very real importance here given to the expectations that surround the September meeting, I think it significant that we have a commitment from the Prime Minister that he will not try to inflate expectations in a way that might lead to either disagreement or disappointment in September.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the words are quite clear—"to finalize agreements on work under way", which are the dozen or so items. The Leader of the Opposition suggests that "finalize agreements" might mean only finalize agreements on that on which we had finalized agreement. I do not think that is a productive way of interpreting the statement we made yesterday.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition seeks a commitment from me that I will not consider that as a deadline. I will not give him that commitment. Quite to the contrary, I consider that as a deadline. I suggest that certainly many of the premiers there, and if I understand the Leader of the New Democratic Party, do consider that as a deadline. I do not want to rope in any premier who might say that he personally does not consider it a deadline. But I do, and I suggest that that was the meaning of the text that we adopted generally yesterday.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, just so that we are clear on this point, the Prime Minister is telling Parliament today that he expects to have, after the four-day meeting in September, an agreement by the 11 first ministers on each of the 12 items in