

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: I challenge the opposition to indicate what consensus is to their minds. However, let us assume that there is no agreement; then what do we do? We ask the Canadian people to choose between politicians who cannot agree. What is undemocratic or unfair about that?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REQUEST FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, I can see why the Prime Minister is frustrated, in view of the fact that the premiers now possibly could come up with a conclusion on a consensus.

However, in view of the fact that as Prime Minister his first responsibility is the integrity and the unity of the country, I would like to ask him why it is that he does not accept the position of the Liberal leader of Quebec, Mr. Claude Ryan, who as late as this morning reiterated that, if elected on April 13, he will insist on a federal-provincial conference. Why is the Prime Minister in such a hurry, prior to April 13, to have this matter go to Britain? Why will he not sit down with the federalist government of Quebec and the premiers who have now come up with a consensus? Why is he unwilling to sit down with his Canadian counterparts?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I have been sitting down with the premiers of the various provinces since 1968. We have been looking for a solution to this problem, as other prime ministers and premiers have been looking for the solution to this problem since 1927.

Mr. Beatty: Why not wait two weeks?

Mr. Trudeau: How can they say I have not consulted? How can they say that I am not prepared to hear other views? They say, "How about two weeks more?" In the name of what?

● (1430)

Some hon. Members: Canada.

An hon. Member: Listen and learn.

Mr. Clark: Au nom du Canada.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I just have to remind hon. members opposite that that is exactly the line they were taking in the House when they prevented Canada from getting its flag.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: They do not like to be reminded of that. We hear groans when we talk about the flag, but they are on record, and many members sitting in the House were there then.

An hon. Member: Tell us about national unity again.

An hon. Member: Where were you when the country needed you?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I suppose it is impossible to answer a question when other members who do not have the floor keep asking questions. I urge those who answer questions to limit themselves to answering the question which was asked by the member who had the floor. Otherwise it is an encouragement for heckling to happen.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I thought you were drawing the attention of the school children in the gallery to the misconduct of the opposition members.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: You have really cheapened yourself, Prime Minister.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON SALARIES AND WAGES

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Madam Speaker, I hope to have a chance to ask my question and hear the response—

An hon. Member: Don't count on it.

Mr. Murphy: My question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. In light of the document which was released yesterday in which it was pointed out that inflation may be fought on the backs of public servants, and in which it was also pointed out that 68 per cent of the public servants whose contracts are expiring in the near future are already lagging behind the private sector, and since it is also pointed out in the document that the guideline of the government would, of course, have to override the principle of comparability in the determination of public sector compensation, would the minister explain to the House why it is government policy to force the public service to take the brunt of the blame for what is happening in terms of inflation, and would he also explain to the House what he considers to be a justifiable wage gap between the poorly paid public sector and those in the private sector?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, the hon. member seems to be relying upon press reports and not upon the stated policy of this government with respect to public sector compensation. I answered the question directly in the House yesterday and he may have seen the press reports this morning. I believe the hon. member is referring to some suggestion, as I recall it, that a 10 per cent cap was to be applied. I can assure hon. members