

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. lady withdrew the preamble of her previous question because it was quite inaccurate.

Mr. Pym and I did discuss this matter. The attitude I took with him is one which I have taken constantly in the House. That is to say, every amendment since 1867 passed in Great Britain concerning the British North America Act, first had to be discussed and passed in this House. This is what is happening with this amendment. Not only was it discussed in this House but it was considerably amended by a committee of this House. Therefore, the British could not and should not take the attitude that they were being asked to do something which this House did not do. This House is precisely passing on the charter of rights.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Since the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands simply repeated her question I will allow her a supplementary question.

Miss MacDonald: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My supplementary question is with regard to this same meeting. I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether the present Canadian court proceedings were discussed with the Right Hon. Francis Pym. If so, did the Prime Minister say that the thing to do was to act as if everything was all right, and then if the court decision were to be unfavourable to the government, the matter would be discussed again?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I pointed out to Mr. Pym that the courts were being used by the provinces as a tactical ploy to obtain a delay. I substantiated that by—

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Trudeau: I repeat my assertion in this House. The reason I said that is that we have six provinces wanting to contest the matter before the courts. The hon. lady shakes her head as if to say no. She will, at least, have to admit that that is right; six provinces are contesting it before the courts. Three of them are doing so with different questions. They are staging it so that it will all come out in a length of time. They have not been able to agree among themselves what questions they would ask. They have not been able to agree whether they would do it before one court, three or six. They have not even been able to agree on the timing. But they are not anxious to receive the answers quickly. They want to have the answers to one question before the other court studies the second series of questions, and so on.

This, to me, Madam Speaker—and I am just repeating my conversation with Mr. Pym—smacks of using the court to obtain political delay. When you do not have the courage to go to the people, and tell them that you do not like the substance, you do as the official opposition is doing; you discuss the modalities and the procedures because you know that on the substance you must agree with the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

EDUCATION**POSSIBLE CUTBACKS IN UNIVERSITY FUNDING**

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, that is the most applause I have received in a long time! My question does not have to do with the machinations of the "Tory International" but with matters affecting Canada.

My question is for the Minister of Justice who is also Minister of State for Social Development. It concerns recommendations which are before the social development committee of cabinet at this very moment. I would like to ask the minister whether or not there are proposals before that committee which would have the effect of cutting \$1.5 billion of federal funding to our universities and over \$500 million for both hospital and medical care. Can the minister tell us whether it is the view of the government that it has the power unilaterally to amend the established programs financing legislation without negotiating with the provinces and without dealing with the groups in question?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance answered that question in the House last Friday and I have nothing to add to his remarks. Those programs of course are always under government review and time comes when they must be renegotiated, so the Minister of Finance explained the government position concerning the renegotiation of those agreements with the provincial administrations.

[English]

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, I know the minister has other preoccupations; we are all aware of that. Nevertheless, there is a matter before a committee of cabinet which involves a very substantial question with regard to services which are to be provided to Canadian institutions right across the country from Newfoundland to British Columbia. He is the chairman of that committee. I think we are entitled to receive answers from him, not the non-answers we received from the Minister of Finance on Friday.

Are there proposals before this committee which would have the effect of substantially changing the responsibilities of the Government of Canada for post-secondary education? Can he at least give us the assurance that there will be no unilateral changes on the part of the federal government until such time as the parliamentary task force has had an opportunity to discuss the changes which the government is contemplating?

Mr. Chrétien: Madam Speaker, some of these agreements with the provinces will reach maturity soon, at which time they will have to be renegotiated. We are looking into that matter right now. When the time comes we will negotiate with the provinces. At that time this House will be informed of the government's position in those negotiations, but it is completely premature to speak about it now.