

prepared to make the announcement this week that the funding has been restored so that what he says he wants to accomplish can have a possibility of succeeding?

• (1425)

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, the commitment of this Government and that of the Prime Minister to making Canada whole again under the Constitution of Canada will always and continually reflect the needs of the aboriginal people of Canada.

I draw to the Hon. Member's attention that on August 6 the Prime Minister wrote the four aboriginal leaders in Canada. In his letter he said:

—once it is clear to me that conditions are conducive to a successful aboriginal constitutional conference, I will not hesitate to convene First Ministers for discussions around this issue.

We have had artificially imposed deadlines in the past which, unfortunately, did not lead to success. To impose another artificial deadline on something as important as aboriginal self-government in Canada at this time I think would be counter-productive.

[Translation]

PRINCIPLE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR NATIVE PEOPLE—
HOLDING OF CONFERENCE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. He stated he agrees with the principle of self-government for native people. All Parties here in the House endorse this concept. In this context the Prime Minister made a positive reference to Mr. Bourassa of the Quebec Government.

My question is quite simple. The Government of the Province of Quebec is very sympathetic concerning the needs of native people. All Parties here are in agreement. Would the Prime Minister be prepared to get in touch with Mr. Bourassa and the other premiers and convince them that a conference on this objective should be included in the Accord?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the idea of a conference on such an objective is quite acceptable. I said so publicly. I even predicted after the failure of the last federal-provincial conference on native rights that, despite that failure, we would ultimately be successful in securing a degree of justice in favour of native people. That has already been done.

What is missing is an important player around the table, keeping in mind the political realities which prevailed. As a result of the intervention of First Ministers in Edmonton, we deemed appropriate to conclude the Meech Lake Accord which, I should think, will have a very beneficial impact on the

lives of native peoples within a foreseeable future in Canada. I know I can count on the support of my hon. friend in this respect.

[English]

REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT OF MEECH LAKE ACCORD

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with the Prime Minister's desire to have Quebec there. We all welcome that distinct possibility right now with the adoption of this Accord. I want to address my question to the Prime Minister in the context of assuming Quebec is going to be there. It is the one province that has already accepted the Accord.

Does the Prime Minister not think it is desirable to improve the Accord by adding a limited number of amendments that are consistent with it, particularly in this instance on the important question of the principle of self-government, including the idea of a commitment to a particular conference? Why can the Premier of Quebec and the other Premiers not be asked to initial and support this kind of limited amendment that is totally consistent with what they have already agreed?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that is required. I have already stated on behalf of, I think, all parliamentarians, that there is going to be a conference. We are going to deal again with the absence of justice for our native peoples. I have made that very clear.

Mr. Tobin: Justice delayed is justice denied.

An Hon. Member: Where were you for the last 20 years?

Mr. Mulroney: I indicated, Mr. Speaker, that clearly we would want to try to create conditions as propitious as possible for success, to lend themselves to success on behalf of the native peoples. They have been let down too often in the past for us to try again without a reasonable assurance of success.

• (1430)

It is my judgment, and I may be wrong, that the native peoples of Canada stand an infinitely greater chance of success with the Confederation having been completed by Quebec being present at the constitutional table in their behalf. With Quebec there I think we can state with a good measure of conviction that at that point in time we can deal, probably successfully, with this historic and legitimate grievance on behalf of the native peoples of Canada. That would be my undertaking to the House of Commons.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!