

Inquiries of the Ministry

the last few days, which must be as disturbing to the Prime Minister as it is to us, is the Prime Minister prepared to give the House an assurance that the contemplated parliamentary committee will be established either during the coming week or during the first week after we return following the Christmas recess?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): Perhaps I can respond to this question. I have spoken to certain members opposite, in particular the hon. member for Peace River, and we expect to be meeting later this day to discuss possible terms of reference of that committee. It would appear now, bearing in mind the list of items set down for completion before the House rises for the Christmas recess, as indicated by me last week, that there will not be the opportunity we hoped would exist for a two-day debate on this subject. It seems likely, therefore, that the arrangements to be made among the representatives of the parties will relate to some time after the House reconvenes following the Christmas recess. It would certainly be my intention to have the committee reference called as early as possible in the next part of the session.

Mr. Stanfield: My question was whether a reference would be made next week or during the first week of our return following the Christmas recess. Could either the Prime Minister or the leader of the House give such an assurance?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): I do not want to repeat the answer I have given, but it seems to me fairly obvious that there will not be an opportunity to debate it next week. However, we shall certainly seek an opportunity to have it debated as soon as we get back.

Mr. Stanfield: I know there have been discussions about the terms of reference. I will ask the Prime Minister whether he is prepared to assure the House that the terms of reference will be broad enough to enable the committee to consider not only proposals put forward by the government of Canada but also proposals put forward by provinces or proposals which may come from other sources for consideration by the committee? In other words, can the Prime Minister assure us that the terms of reference of this committee will be broad enough to enable it to examine fully the constitutional question as a whole, not merely the federal position?

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I understand from the leader of the House that this is precisely the subject which is being discussed at present between him and the leaders of the other parties.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Has-tings): A supplementary to the Prime Minister. Since it has become obvious that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get agreement or even consensus about the important matters discussed at these conferences, is the Prime Minister giving consideration to arranging for a great deal more intergovernmental discussion at ministerial and prime ministerial levels long before the ministers gather in Ottawa for these conferences in order that the chances of reaching decisions and making solid progress can be materially improved?

Mr. Trudeau: If the hon. member had read any of the reports which have been tabled he would know that all these meetings are prepared at considerable length by meetings of officials and, in many cases, by meetings at the ministerial level. He is therefore suggesting that something should be done which we have been doing for two or three years now.

Mr. Hees: Whatever has been done has not been very effective. If the Prime Minister considers that what was achieved in the last two or three days amounts to progress, is it not obvious why the economy of the country is moving downhill?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

TRADE

WHEAT—DISCUSSIONS WITH U.S.S.R.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister without Portfolio who has responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board. It has to do with the discussions which are going on in Moscow with respect to getting the Soviet Union to take up the balance of its requirement for wheat under the old agreement. Has agreement now been reached between the Canadian Wheat Board and the government of the Soviet Union regarding the sale of wheat to the Soviet Union by Canada?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): I have said frequently that I prefer not to comment on negotiations in progress. However, I can confirm that the Chief Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner are still in Moscow. I will also confirm that, as I have been for some time, I am full of hope.