

Oral Questions

which it will begin to consider whether the government's constitutional resolution is within the competence of Parliament to enact alone. Rather than having Parliament risk acting illegally and rather than running the risk that Parliament would act in defiance of our own customs, will the Prime Minister respect Canadian custom, and will he withdraw his resolution until the court has decided whether it is lawful for Parliament to deal with that resolution?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could elaborate a little bit on what he calls the custom. As far as I can study Parliament, it is customary for Parliament to deal with matters, and it is also customary for citizens or various parties to disagree in the courts. This process has always happened, and if Parliament were to interrupt its work every time somebody claims that its work is illegal, then we would be doing no work at all. That is the custom in this land. We do our work. The courts do theirs.

REQUEST FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I will naturally accept the invitation of the Prime Minister to argue that case later in the day.

The Prime Minister will know that Premier Blakeney has now indicated that eight premiers expect to discuss today or, if not today, very, very soon—but probably today—details of a new constitutional proposal, which was discussed in general terms in Winnipeg on Tuesday, a constitutional proposal which would let Canadians decide our Canadian conduct here in Canada.

In light of this statement by Premier Blakeney and in light of the meeting which has occurred in Winnipeg this week, is the Prime Minister prepared to set aside his own stubborn deadlines, and is he prepared, in the national interest as the leader of the national government, actively to seek a meeting on constitutional change with the Canadian premiers before he bulldozes this resolution through Parliament and takes the Canadian question to another country?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, we have been discussing this subject with the premiers since the spring of 1968, in a constant fashion through the decade. We discussed it very intensively beginning, I believe, around June 5 of last year. We had a first ministers' meeting.

We have, in the resolution now, a provision that discussions must go on for the next two years in order that we agree on an amending formula, following which, if we still cannot agree after that fixed period of two years—which hardly seems like bulldozing, to use the phrase of the Leader of the Opposition—then the people will be asked to decide for us in a referendum. Discussions are not only wanted; they are called for in the resolution before the House.

● (1120)

The Leader of the Opposition goes on to make the point, I think his words were “let Canadians decide”. Madam Speaker, that is what we are asking: let the Canadians in this House decide and let us decide—

Some hon. Members: Call an election.

Mr. Trudeau: We are prepared to let this House decide any time. We will even let an amendment come to a vote.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INITIATION OF DISCUSSIONS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): The Prime Minister appears to be under the illusion that his resolution has already passed and that the provinces are today without the power which his resolution tries to take away from them as he moves this nation towards a unitary state. That is not the situation in this country today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The Prime Minister has not yet succeeded in his goal of changing the fundamental nature of this country. There are provincial governments which represent the people of Canada as well as this Parliament does. They have a role to play in constitutional discussion. My question to the Prime Minister is this: since we know that he has his representatives over in Britain trying to make a deal with the government of another country, I should like to ask him whether he personally, or through his senior representatives, since the meeting in Winnipeg of the eight premiers on Tuesday, has been in touch or has initiated discussions with those premiers, to see if it might be possible to arrange a meeting which would allow all the governments of Canada representing all the people of Canada to come together here in our country to agree on a Canadian Constitution in a Canadian way, rather than following the practice which the Leader of the NDP in the province of Saskatchewan has said leads to bitterness in this country.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Clark: My question to the Prime Minister is whether he personally, or through any of his intermediaries, sought a meeting with the premiers since the Tuesday meeting in Winnipeg.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about taking power from the provinces to make Canada a unitary state.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Trudeau: Surely if there is any shift of power in this resolution before the House, it gives more power to the provinces—