

Oral Questions

government ministers or representatives and Canadian government ministers or representatives suggesting that the British would want basic Canadian disagreements to be resolved in Canada before Ottawa asks Britain to resolve them? I am not asking for paragraph by paragraph verification of *The Times* story; I am asking the question whether or not there has been any suggestion to that effect conveyed in any way by any representatives of the British government to the Canadian government.

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, there has certainly been no proposal or request of that kind in our discussions with the British government. We had a free-flowing discussion, and while many possibilities were canvassed, as happens in a discussion of this nature, certainly that was not the way in which the conversation ended. There was no request, suggestion or proposal of that kind.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I believe that the minister has now said that there was no suggestion of that kind at any time. If that is what he intended to say, I would like him to verify his statement. Since the government strategy document anticipated provincial and parliamentary opposition to certain parts of the Liberal proposal, will the minister tell the House of Commons whether Canadian ministers or representatives raised with the British government or representatives the possibility of disagreement here in Canada and the possibility that Britain might have to decide questions that are deeply contentious in Canada?

● (1420)

Mr. MacGuigan: We certainly acquainted the British government and its representatives with the fact that there would be disagreement in Canada. That was already apparent at the time we saw them but, of course, there was a common assumption on both sides that the normal constitutional convention in the United Kingdom would be followed, namely, that the advice of the Canadian government would be the advice heard by the British government and that a joint resolution of the Canadian Parliament would be what is accepted by the British Parliament.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the minister and the rest of the House will know that detailed memoranda of conversations of this kind are kept. In light of the extraordinary circumstances, it being important that all members of Parliament know exactly what was discussed between ministers and, indeed, between officials on this question, and in light of the extraordinary situation of the government seeking a joint address on a matter that is contentious in Parliament and a matter of disagreement among the provinces and under challenge in the courts, I wonder if the minister would agree to publish the Canadian memoranda of the conversations in which he and his colleague, the minister responsible for the environment and other things, participated. In these extraordinary circumstances I wonder if there would be a willingness to publish those memoranda.

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, I do not think that would be in accord with the precedents nor with the practice, because it would remove the sense of confidentiality all sides have in discussions of this kind.

As I mentioned to the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition, there was free-flowing discussion with various representatives of the British government. We have stated here the conclusions of that discussion. I do not think it would be appropriate to go through the discussion here in Parliament.

PATRIATION—POSSIBILITY OF DISAGREEMENT—POSITION OF UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the same minister. I want to reiterate that it is our belief that this is a Canadian matter, that we should patriate the constitution with an amending formula which has widespread support here in Canada and that all future amendments should be made in Canada.

In view of the at best very weak denial he issued this morning—his press release says that he denies the story as written, so the minister is obviously leaving a fair amount of doubt that there was veracity to the story in *The Times* this morning—just on this narrow point, what would be the position of the government of the United Kingdom if there was widespread disagreement in Canada, including among the provinces? Can the minister answer that specific question?

Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, I do not know to what communication this morning the hon. member is referring. I issued no press release this morning. In fact, my view was that the matter should await the House this afternoon where I assumed there would be questions. It may be that some answers were given by spokesmen for the department, but they were not intended to express our total reaction to the proposals or the comments which were being made by some British and Canadian media.

With respect to the precise question the hon. member asks, as I said, the common assumption on both sides during the discussion, which was never questioned by anyone and in fact has been expressly affirmed both in public and in private by the United Kingdom government, is that what the United Kingdom parliament looks to is a joint resolution of both Houses of this Parliament and nothing else.

Mr. Epp: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister and it flows out of his answer. It obviously raises the question of who is responsible in his department for press releases. More importantly, in view of the difficulty in which this minister has now put this House and in view of the various reports he has given, will he assure the House that he will make a statement on motions to explain clearly what happened.

Further, in view of the requests of a number of Canadians, notwithstanding also the premiers at the first ministers' conference, would the minister recommend to his cabinet colleagues