

Oral Questions

Mr. Clark: If the shouting on the Liberal side will subside, let me bring the attention of the Prime Minister back to the first ministers. Twice now I have asked, and now for a third time I ask the Prime Minister about the possibility of a meeting between himself and the first ministers to discuss the best means of resolving the constitutional problems the country faces, and particularly the constitutional resolution before the House.

First, did the Prime Minister intend his answer to me the other day to preclude a meeting with first ministers before the constitutional resolution goes to Britain?

Second, is there any element of that constitutional package which he would not be prepared to have discussed in a meeting of first ministers?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says this House of Commons has the right to know if what it is doing is legal before it does it.

Mr. Andre: The Newfoundland court says it is illegal.

Some hon. Members: Answer the question.

Mr. Trudeau: Hon. members opposite keep saying, "Answer the question".

An hon. Member: You don't do it.

Mr. Trudeau: I do not do it because you do not let me do it.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stevens: Poor Pierre.

● (1425)

Mr. Trudeau: I think we are well accustomed in this House to the practice of every member of the opposition making statements in preface to a question which, in my view, can be discussed and answered, then a question is added to the preamble. In past days, when I have been answering the sometimes very long preambles to questions, I got shouts from the opposition that I should be answering the questions. I am first answering the preamble, which the opposition has been allowed to make, and then I deal with the question. If you allow the preamble, Madam Speaker, I take it you will allow the answer to the preamble.

Mr. Clark: Now the question.

Mr. Trudeau: Not now the question. First the preamble, my friend.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the Opposition, in preface to his question, says the House wants to know before it does it if we are doing something legal. This would be the way to ensure the paralysis of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: If every time a measure is introduced into this House, somebody, whether it be a province, a private individual, or some other litigant challenged the legality and put the matter before the courts—

Mr. Andre: But what you are doing is illegal.

Mr. Trudeau:—then this House would sit back and say let the courts decide. I suggest to hon. members opposite that they are failing to accept the division between the judicial responsibilities and the legislative responsibilities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: Like Bill C-60.

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the Opposition talks about a first ministers' conference. He will remember that in the resolution before the House there is a provision for first ministers' conferences over the next two years. At this first ministers' conference we can discuss any item they want to put on the agenda. We can even discuss changing the resolution which would be adopted by this House, in a way which would be changed by the amending formula provided for in the resolution. That is why I said it can be negotiated. It can even be changed. The Leader of the Opposition can conduct his next campaign, if he is still around, on a mandate—

An hon. Member: You are getting desperate.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau:—to withdraw the charter of rights from the Constitution, if that is what he desires. But I think I explained at some length, a couple of weeks ago, that after some 54 years of waiting for federal-provincial conferences to obtain—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: Waiting for what?

Mr. Trudeau: Waiting for what? The hon. member for St. John's West does not know what we have been waiting for.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

POSITION OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, I direct my question to the Minister of the Environment. In his appearance on "Canada AM" yesterday, the Minister of the Environment said that the Canadian government would insist that the Canadian resolution be placed on the Order Paper of the British Parliament, in effect giving that resolution first reading in Britain before the Supreme Court of Canada could rule on the legality of the proposal.

Has the Minister of the Environment had any communication with the British government on that matter. Can he tell us whether the British government has given him any indication